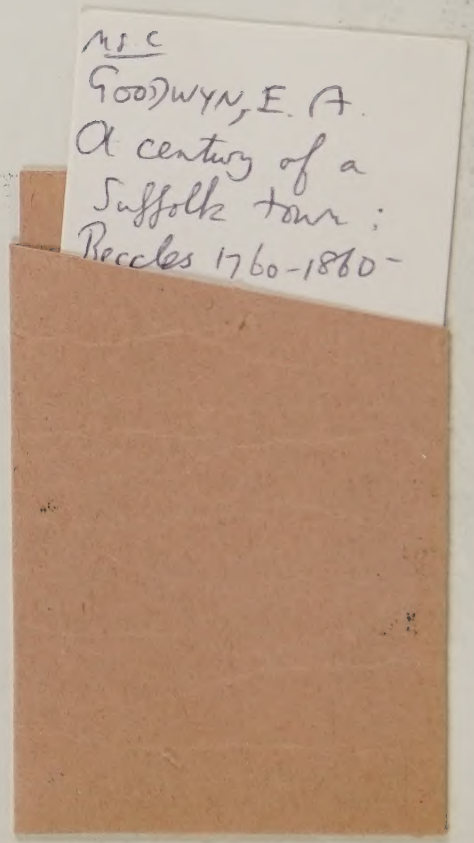
A Century of a Suffolk Town

Beccles 1760-1860

PART I: 1760-1815

by

E. A. GOODWYN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PART I. 1760-1815

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E. A. GOODWYN

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"A CENTURY OF A SUFFOLK TOWN: BECCLES 1760-1860"
PART I: 1760-1815

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION

1. *A Brief Survey of the Period.*

In "A Suffolk Town in Mid-Victorian England" I tried to give a detailed picture of life in the market town of Beccles during the 1860's. My choice of the period 1760-1860 has been determined partly by that first study; but there were other reasons which made 1760 a convenient starting point. In that year began the long, eventful and troubled reign of George III; and during the second half of the eighteenth century the local Corporation records and the East Anglian newspapers begin to yield a more abundant harvest of information.

The obvious year to mark a division of the period is 1815. The long war ended. The attention of the nation, so long engaged upon external affairs — upon battles, casualty lists and the defence of the country against invasion — turned upon the domestic scene, where troubles actual and potential were hardly less serious than those lately overcome at such a heavy cost.

The period 1760-1815 was especially marked by wars. The Seven Years War ended in 1763. The war which began over the American quarrel in 1775 — and in which Britain was eventually fighting against France and Spain as well as against the rebellious colonists — dragged on until 1783. Ten years later began the long struggle with revolutionary France.

There were many changes in England. Some were accelerated or intensified by the demands created by war. The urgent need to grow more food was a powerful spur to the enclosures of land which proceeded through the period with increasing rapidity. The most extensive enclosures took place during the Napoleonic Wars. Though they greatly increased the efficiency of agriculture, they caused much hardship to labourers and small farmers, and contributed to the wider division of rich and poor which was the most deplorable change of the period. Greater poverty bred greater crime. In rural areas we find, on the one hand, a steady increase in the number of game-

keepers and of the infamous man-traps to combat poaching; on the other hand, sporadic food riots, roads infested by footpads and highwaymen, and bitter resentment against the new Houses of Industry for the destitute. Growing awareness, among those who were not concerned solely to protect their own interests, of these great and inseparable evils led to a partial awakening of the national conscience. John Howard's labours helped to purge the grosser evils from the prisons. Wilberforce led the agitation against the Slave Trade. The Sunday School movement began and made rapid strides. Charitable societies multiplied; private benevolence flourished. No finer example of an earnest and energetically philanthropic family can be found than the Gurneys of Norwich, whose multifarious activities in charitable causes began in the latter half of the eighteenth century. A comparison between English literature in 1760 and in 1815 also shows the change in the moral outlook. The novel, which is the best literary measure of public taste, had ceased to be coarse.

No account of these changes, however brief, can exclude the vast improvement in roads and vehicles. Turnpikes were made on many main roads which now for the first time had a reasonably firm surface; and springs were introduced in carriages. Travel became quicker and less uncomfortable.

The changes here outlined are among those illustrated in particular chapters of this book. I have not attempted a chronological order, but have preferred a loose structure, allowing for some discursiveness. The picture is meant to have Beccles in the foreground as a typical market town, with East Anglia in the middle distance and the broader sweep of national life in the background.

2. *The Market Town.*

The Census of 1801 gives the first reasonably reliable figures of population in England. There were then in Suffolk besides the larger towns of Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds, twenty-eight places with populations over 1,000. Only six of these, of which Beccles was one, had populations exceeding 2,000. Several were a good deal nearer 2,000 than 1,000, but 2,000 might be taken as an average population for the more important market towns.

The population of Beccles was estimated thus:

1789 — 2,565
1796 — 2,440
1801 — 2,788
1811 — 2,979
1821 — 3,493

but of these figures the first two are unlikely to be correct.

Such towns were true centres of local life. Here the local magistrates met; and at Beccles the Quarterly Assizes were held. Here was the gaol or bridewell, and here lived the attorneys in surprising numbers and social variety. The enclosure movement provided many of them with lucrative work. Here too lived the doctors who served the locality and who, as in Beccles and nearby Bungay, were influential members of the Town Corporation.

Banking was beginning to expand. Banks appointed local agents in the market towns, as the centres of business. Fairs still flourished, while shops were increasing. It was quite possible for a merchant to make a fortune in a small town. Thus in Beccles Edward Arnold, who died in 1805, had amassed £20,000 in forty years of business. Though trade had fluctuations in the second half of the eighteenth century and there were bankruptcies, on market days the inn stables were crowded and the larger inns rose to a position they lost only when the railways in the mid-nineteenth century superseded the mail and stage coaches.

Even small towns, in these times of restricted travel, were centres of a flourishing social life and of amusement. The Assembly Room drew to its monthly gatherings the gentility of the neighbourhood for dancing, cards and conversation. The larger inns catered for the convivial side of social life throughout the year, but especially on sporting occasions such as the local races. Several East Anglian towns had race meetings of two or three days duration. The drama was popular and was not confined to the larger places. Travelling companies visited the smaller towns.

Another function of the town, in a period of many troop movements by road and of large militia forces, was the billeting of soldiers — a frequent cause of bitter complaint!

The importance of the small town for education has been insufficiently noticed. Though many of the grammar schools founded in them in much earlier days had decayed, there sprung up beside them numerous small schools, day and boarding, both for boys and girls. A small town might have two or three such schools, as well as humbler places of rudimentary instruction, serving its own locality. The difference between them is illustrated in Crabbe's couplet from "The Borough" —

> "To every class we have a school assign'd,
> Rules for all ranks and food for every mind."

Schools require substantial houses. And it was a notable period for building, not only of country mansions, but of the smaller yet commodious and elegant houses of tradesmen and merchants, of doctors, attorneys and clergy, which graced the streets of towns now for the first time, by the end of the century, moderately lighted and adequately paved.

Finally, there were to be found in such places some men of independent means — merchants, for instance, who had saved and invested enough money to retire when they could write 'gent' after their signatures. Such was John Price who in 1758, wishing to retire from trade in London, saw an advertisement for a house in Beccles, bought the house, and ended his days in the town. His daughter Elizabeth married into the prominent local family of the Crowfoots. Again, prosperous local tradesmen might retire and, like Pope's Sir Baalam, 'grow polite'. The town had its social hierarchy, but this was not inflexible. There was always a fair amount of room on the middle slopes though not so much at the top.

Beccles Corporation showed that it knew the advantage to a town of attracting people of gentility, or aspirations to gentility; for in 1785 it was agreed that "An Assembly Room and Play House would conduce to the benefit, advantage and prosperity of the town, inasmuch as it would be an inducement to persons of independent fortune to settle and reside there". £625 was raised by the issue locally of Tontine Bonds. The Assembly Room was built and a card room was added before the end of the century.

I have tried to take a good deal of illustrative detail from East Anglian writers and especially from that strangely neglected poet, Crabbe, whose long life spans the period. Crabbe was born in 1754 and died in 1832. He was a remarkable observer of the social scene. His earliest success, "The Village", so justly praised by Johnson, is well known and frequently mentioned by social historians. References to his other poems are rare, though they are a mine of information on English social history. The most obvious example is "The Borough" (1810) in which Crabbe gives a comprehensive picture of a country town, his native Aldeburgh, drawing largely on the memories of his youth and early manhood. Crabbe was at his best when exercising the novelist's talents — depicting character and telling a story, with judicious use of dialogue. His "Tales" (1812) contain a great deal of his best work. In one of these, "The Lover's Journey", an autobiographical poem of the days of the poet's courtship, Beccles and the surrounding countryside provide much of the setting. As the young Orlando rides from Aldeburgh to meet his fiancée in Beccles, everything he meets on the way appears charming alike to the eye and the mind. But on his arrival he is told that Laura has gone to visit friends. She has left him a note; he may follow if he so wishes; and, of course, he does, but with changed feelings. Now, as he rides along the road towards Loddon, nothing can please —

"Woods! waters! meadows! Will they never end?
'Tis a vile prospect: — Gone to see a friend!"

Then the lovers meet and the explanation of the unexpected visit is readily accepted. All is well. Love and youthful cheerfulness are restored.

Crabbe married Sarah Elmy, who came of a family long prominent in Beccles. Through them Crabbe formed friendships in the town, to which he was a frequent visitor over many years. He preached in the church; he attended the plays. In that excellent biography, "The Life of George Crabbe by his Son", we hear of a family visit in 1790 to Mrs. Elmy senior and her two daughters at "the delightful town of Beccles .... that gem of the Waveney".

The visitor to the ancient parish church of Beccles may expect to be shown two entries in the Marriage Register: the wedding on May 11th 1749 of Rev. Edmund Nelson, curate of the parish, and Catherine Suckling, who became the parents of Horatio Nelson; and the wedding of George Crabbe to Sarah Elmy on December 15th, 1783.

Beccles and Bungay. I have included a good deal of illustrative material from Bungay. The two towns, less than five miles apart, and both situated beside the Waveney, were very much alike. There was much intercourse between them. Both had a considerable river trade in coal, timber and corn. As I have not given a separate chapter to Trade, I include here two examples of the type of goods carried on the river:

February 1770 "New Lime is sold and loaded at the Lime Kiln at Beccles at 10/3 per great Chaldron: 3 Chs. delivered at Lowestoft, Halesworth, or Harleston at £2. 5. 9, 3 at Bungay, Loddon or Haddiscoe at £1. 19. 9 or at any other places of equal Distance and Roads, same price. Also Flint Stones for Foundations or Paving, Grindstones, White Bricks, Twelve and Nine Inch White and Red Pavements and Gutter Bricks at the lowest prices.

N.B. The STAY FOR ME, John Barret, Master, 20 tons burden, goes every 10 days from the Lime Kiln to Trowse for Chalk, and will consequently carry Hay, Corn or any sort of goods from Beccles, or any Quay between Beccles and St. Olave's, to Norwich and Yarmouth, on the most reasonable terms."

July 1775. "Bungay Staithe: Coal Trade.

Coals delivered at the Staithe. 25s. per Chauldron ready money; if not paid when taken away, 26s.

Delivered at Diss, Scole, Palgrave and in neighbourhood of these at 33s.

N.B. Fir, Timber, Deals, Lath, Dutch and Hull Tiles, Lime, Cinders and Welch Coals".

In both towns during the latter part of the eighteenth century, there were Assemblies for the local gentility, and the usual Clubs. Both had boarding schools for girls. Bungay, though slightly smaller, was perhaps superior to Beccles in cultural efforts. It was the first to have a theatre; and there were frequent concerts at its principal inn, "The Three Tuns". Earlier in the century, Bungay had a small but flourishing Spa at a time when inland Spas were fashionable. It also had a Grammar School of sixteenth century foundation (whose History has recently been written by Mr. R. Houghton). On the other hand, Beccles boasted a proper Assembly Room after 1785 and Quarter Sessions were held in the town.

Both towns had races and fairs on the common. Both, at the end of the century, had Volunteers (infantry and cavalry). The similarities, indeed, are too numerous to warrant mention in detail — except for one more. In 1792 it was reported: "Beccles and Bungay follow the laudable examples before them and stand forward in the cause of humanity. Petitions to Parliament are signing at both towns for the Abolition of the African Slave Trade". Three weeks later, the Beccles Petition, backed by several hundred signatures, was quoted in full — "Your Petitioners having established a conviction in their minds of the manifest and numberless evils resulting from the African Slave Trade, and the iniquity that pervades every branch of it, of the extensive scenes of misery and wretchedness it inevitably occasions to

an innocent and oppressed race of people — also being of opinion that such a commerce is incompatible with the freedom enjoyed by us (under our excellent constitution), being founded upon injustice and violation of the rights of nature and humanity . . . humbly pray that you will be pleased to provide a law to prevent the future importation of Slaves into our West India Colonies".

CHAPTER II.

A Celebration

The accession of George III in 1760 was an occasion for joyful celebrations throughout the country. The Hanoverian dynasty in the persons of George I and George II had aroused little enthusiasm. But George III was different. Unlike them, he gloried in the name of Englishman. He was young, and he came to the throne with a reputation of virtue in his private life unusual in that age of moral laxity.

On September 12th, 1761, the following announcement appeared in the "Norwich Gazette":

"The principal Inhabitants of BECCLES, in the County of Suffolk, intending to celebrate the Day of his Majesty's Coronation, propose a Two Shillings and Sixpence Ordinary at the Assembly Room, at the White Lion, at Two in the Afternoon, and request the Favour of such Gentlemen in the Neighbourhood as chuse to accompany them on this joyous occasion, to send for tickets to Mr. Otley, at the said White Lion, on or before the 19th Instant. In the Evening Fire-works will be plaid off, at the Expence of the Corporation, which when over a general Illumination will begin, and at Ten there will be a Ball for the Ladies.

N.B. In order to prevent any Damage that might ensue to the Inhabitants, the Fireworks will be plaid off under the Direction of a skilful Person. And Notice is hereby given, that if any Person or Persons shall attempt to throw or fire off any Squibs, Rocketts, or other Fire-works, or fire any Guns or Pistols, in the Market Place or Streets of the said Town, they will be prosecuted with the utmost Severity".

Costly and spectacular firework displays were popular in the eighteenth century. They were sometimes accompanied by the brutality which characterised so many popular amusements. Thus at the Bear Gardens, Hockley-in-the-Hole, an entertainment of 1730

included "A Mad Bull dressed up with fire-works, to be turned loose .... likewise a dog dressed up with fire-works; also a bear to be turned loose. N.B. a cat to be tied to the bull's tail." The celebration in 1749 of the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle included a firework display the like of which London had never seen before. A "grand overture on warlike instruments" was specially composed for the occasion by Handel, to be performed under his baton, to the accompaniment of a hundred brass cannon, fired singly and placed in the arcades connecting the side pavilions with the main structure erected for the occasion. A total of 10,650 fireworks made a fantastic spectacle — at a cost to His Majesty's Board of Works of "no more than £14,500". This was an exceptionally costly affair, even for London, where by the 1760's firework displays had become a regular feature of the entertainment at Ranelagh pleasure gardens.

London was the setting for all that was most extravagant in such amusements; but their popularity in the provinces was growing. Even private entertainments might be enlivened by fireworks. The "Norfolk Chronicle" reported a birthday entertainment for the Hon. Edward Stratford at Great Glenham Hall in 1769 at which 500 guests were present. There was Fancy Dress. There was dancing in one room, music in another and cards in a third. After supper "curious fireworks were played off", bringing the lavish party to a spectacular close at 2 a.m.

The inclusion of fireworks in the Beccles Celebration of the King's coronation was thus in keeping with the fashion of the times. But it seems to have been the most lavish in the smaller East Anglian towns; and the "Norwich Gazette" gave a full account of it on October 3rd.

"On the day of their Majesties' Coronation, the inhabitants of Beccles, pursuant to their advertisement, dined at the White Lion, with several of the neighbouring gentlemen, where besides a fine buck, which was presented by Sir Thomas Gooch, Bart., the elegance of the ordinary gave universal satisfaction to a numerous company. The town was decorated with garlands, and in particular with a handsome triumphal arch, erected at the expense of Mr. Isaac Blowers senior. To a set of fine fireworks succeeded a general illumination, after which was a ball for the Ladies. The several parts of the day, and the diversions of the evening, were distinguished by discharges of guns from the steeple. On this joyful occasion a handsome collection was made for the poor".

Sir Thomas Gooch of Benacre doubtless had deer in his park. There was deer hunting in Norfolk and Suffolk at this time. Was it, perhaps, for Sir Thomas that this advertisement had appeared in the "Norwich Mercury" in 1758? —

"Wanted Immediately

A young Fellow to hunt a Pack of Hounds: he must not ride upwards of twelve stone, and must be well recommended. Such a one may hear of a place, by applying to Mr. Simon Clark, at the White Lion in Beccles".

This notable celebration, with its blend of boisterousness, conviviality and benevolence, shows an interesting feature of social life in a small town. "The neighbouring gentlemen" — amongst whom was a local baronet — mixed with the principal tradesmen. Isaac Blowers senior, provider of the triumphal arch, was such a tradesman — a substantial man who was well able to give £1,000 security when money was borrowed at interest for the erection of the local House of Industry four years later. He had twice served the office of Portreeve of Beccles; his son was to fill that office four times. In 1761 Blowers the younger was a Churchwarden; and the Portreeve for that year was Owen Holmes, a prosperous grocer, who doubtless made some contribution to the feast to supplement Sir Thomas's fine buck.

The gargantuan eating and drinking in the eighteenth century is notorious. Thus Parson Woodforde's remarkable appetite provides much of the interest in his entertaining diary. But it is only fair to add that, however self-indulgent were the well-to-do, they generally remembered the poor on these occasions. There was a Celebration for the King's Recovery in Bungay in 1789. The day began with the ringing of bells and firing of guns. Six hundredweight of bread was issued to the poor (making the total winter distribution seventy-five hundredweight). "Each of the large families likewise had eighteen pence in money, the small families a shilling and widows sixpence. On the Corn Cross and principal inns flags were displayed with figures and inscriptions suitable to the occasion. At 11 o'clock the children of the Sunday School walked in procession to the church, with a flag and a band of music before them: on the flag was inscribed 'God Save the King' ". The parade over, the children went to Mr. Spilling's school, where a dinner of plumb pudding, roast and boiled beef, with good ale, was provided for 93 of them, by the ladies and gentlemen of the town. Toasts were drunk — "Long Live the King! The Queen and the Royal Family. The Magistrate of Bungay etc." In the evening there was a large assembly at the King's Head, where a special song, written by Mrs. Bonhote of Bungay, and set to music by Mr. Holder, the Bungay organist, was sung; and the day ended with a great display of fireworks.

Many changes occurred during George's long and momentous reign. Among the things that did not change was the custom of public feasting.

The brief interval of peace in 1802 was another occasion for public celebration. When the news of the peace treaty arrived in April the mail at Beccles was received with every demonstration of joy . "The Volunteer Corps, commanded by Capt. Thomas Farr, were ordered immediately under arms and fired three excellent volleys. The gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood dined with officers, etc., of the corps at the King's Head Inn. Several barrels of beer were given to the populace: a grand display of fireworks, etc. — the whole concluded with the greatest harmony. Much praise is due to Jeremiah Smith Esq. Portreeve, for his friendly attention, which so much conduced to good order".

The following week the new Portreeve, Capt. Robert Purvis R.N., J.P. gave the customary dinner "to upwards of a hundred gentlemen, at which the utmost conviviality and harmony prevailed to a late hour". Nor was this all, for the week after that a grand Ball "in Honour of Peace" (tickets 5/- each) was held at the Assembly Room, Purvis being the steward. Alas, these three convivial evenings must have proved too much for the Captain; he died less than a fortnight afterwards, before the final celebration of Thanksgiving Day on June 5th, when nearly 1,600 tickets were distributed to the townsfolk, entitling each bearer to 1 lb. of beef, a 3d. loaf and a quart of ale; whilst Thomas Rede Esq. gave each family a peck of coal to cook their dinner. And there were the usual feasting at the principal inns, illuminations and, of course, "a grand display of fireworks".

The celebrations at Bungay on this day were very similar. 1,300 persons received one pound of beef each and sixpence in bread and beer; the old and infirm were given 2/- each. The Volunteers paraded and then repaired to the Three Tuns for a dinner provided by Nelson Burstal, the Town Reeve. "The poor out of gratitude had strewn the streets with flowers, the bells rang, flags flew and many loyal and constitutional toasts were given and drunk with enthusiasm. In the evening transparencies lighted up the great room viz. the Crown, the British Tree of Liberty, and Britannia with her Standard supported by a Nymph, crowned with a cloud of the sea in which were represented the five British admirals, Howe, St. Vincent, Duncan, Nelson and Warren" — whilst the Volunteers Band played "Britannia rule the Seas".

The celebrations at Beccles on Thanksgiving Day after Trafalgar were also notable. "The principal gentlemen" dined at the King's Head. There was a great fireworks display in the evening. But there was also a service at which the Rector recommended contributions "for the benefit of suffering seamen in the Battle". A considerable collection was made for transmission to the National Fund, the Beccles Volunteers contributing a day's pay each. This became an annual celebration. Five years later, for example, "the day was ushered in with the ringing of the bells, firing of guns, grand display of flags . . . sumptuous dinner at the King's Head . . . loyal and constitutional toasts . . . appropriate songs . . . a late hour." And so on.

The greatest feast of all was the celebration in 1814 — premature as it turned out — of Napoleon's downfall. Beccles Corporation, like many another, maintained the custom in its Portreeve's Feast. On one occasion only was the tradition broken. Gowing the bell-ringer recorded the melancholy fact in his diary: "No Portreeve's feast . No money in the funds".

CHAPTER III

The Landed Gentlemen

"In the eighteenth century the landed gentry were still in full enjoyment of a monopoly of power and wealth". Thus E. W. Bovill begins the chapter on "The Squires" in his "English Country Life 1780-1830". But he goes on to remark that there was no such thing as a typical squire. Some were coarse, some refined; some spent much time in London or abroad, some resided permanently on their estates. Nevertheless, Robert Sparrow Esquire of Worlingham Hall, may be taken as typifying, in his long life as Lord of the Manor of Beccles, two qualities frequently found in the landed gentry of the second half of the eighteenth century: conscientiousness in his local responsibilities and pride of power and place.

James Bird gives an idealised picture of a large country landowner as the poet saw him during his childhood in Yoxford towards the end of the century. "Old Sir John" lived in a large mansion with huge square towers —

> "He was a man of vanished days — a bough
> Of the old English Oak, half-withered now;
> Welcome and plenty smiled within his hall,
> His farms were neat, and, better still, were small:
> His tenants, honest, worthy, and content,
> Could pay, without a banker's cheque, their rent!"

He did not go abroad; he spent his money in the neighbourhood. He did not waste his substance on gambling. He loved country pursuits, especially hunting; and when the hunt was over, he might stop at some Tenant's house —

> "He entered smiling, quaffed the home-brewed ale,
> And courteous listened to the Housewife's tale,
> Yea, with the placid patience of a saint,
> Heard each request, and every grave complaint.
> 'Sir John, the gate is broken, and the cows
> Break from their pasture on our corn to browse!
> The tiles are shattered on the roof, the water
> Drips on the crib, where sleeps my youngest daughter:
> The attic window, Sir, has lost its lead,
> The night-winds whistle round my maiden's bed!
> The late strong gales, Sir John' — 'Good Dame! forbear,
> All these dire ills my Steward shall repair'.
> Now would he smile, and then with accents bland,
> Address her boy, take little Reuben's hand,
> And leave the urchin spell-bound by his charm,
> The half-crown glittering in his tiny palm!"

This animated rural scene, idyllic and amusing, will bear comparison with scenes of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village". As Goldsmith pictures the ideal parson, so Bird pictures the ideal land-owner. In some ways Robert Sparrow resembled Bird's Sir John, but in others decidedly not.

Sparrow's father, an attorney, had married one of the co-heiresses of Laurence Bence of Henstead. He greatly increased his estate thereby; and his son inherited a considerable property. The father had moved from Woodbridge to Worlingham when he bought the Hall there with about 250 acres for £3,850 in 1755. Considerable additions and improvements were made to the Hall, so that it became a fine country seat set in a spacious park — altogether in keeping with the dignity of a landed gentleman.

Robert Sparrow was educated at Bury Grammar School, which at that time enjoyed a very high reputation, before proceeding to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1759. Sparrow acquired a great love of the classics, "With the Roman poets he was particularly conversant", said Dawson Turner in his Memoir of Sparrow, "Virgil, Horace and Martial were, above all, safely lodged in his retentive memory; in his boyhood he had made them his own; and they were not to be wrested from his age". He was a man of wide reading. One of his ruling passions was the extension of his library. This was in keeping with the cultural ambitions of the landed gentry of the time. "I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such times as these", says Darcy in "Pride and Prejudice". Sparrow added to his own the valuable libraries of Sir Oliver St. John, Chief Justice, and of Sir Francis St. John.

A man in Sparrow's position might be called upon to fulfil many duties. Sparrow was, for example, a Commissioner of Sewers, whose responsibility it was to see that proper drainage was maintained in areas subject to flooding. Each parish had to appoint a Dikereeve. It seems there had been some negligence in the 1780's. "At a general session of sewers held at Beccles on Oct. 13th 1789 before Robert Sparrow and John Farr Esquires, Rev. John Amyas, Le Grice Browne Bohun, Geo. Belton and Robt. Rede gentlemen, His Majesty's Commissioners of Sewers for the hundreds of Blything, Mutford and Lothingland and Wangford" it was announced that an order made in 1787 at a Court Leet, by which negligence of Dikereeves could be punished by fines of not more than twenty and not less than five pounds, would be enforced.

He was a patron of local authors; his name is almost invariably found on their subscribers lists.

Sparrow made one attempt to enter Parliament. He was, with Sir William Wake, elected M.P. for Bedford, as a Whig, in 1774. Their opponents were Whitbread and John Howard, the philanthropist. However, Sparrow was unseated on a petition; and in disgust made no further attempt at election. When the Duke of Portland and Burke left the Whigs shortly after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Sparrow joined them; and from that time he became a Tory

and directed his influence towards forwarding the interests of his friends and neighbours, the Earl of Stradbroke and Sir Thomas Gooch for Suffolk and Lord Wodehouse for Norfolk. "There was no length to which he would not go for them", says Dawson Turner — leaving the reader to interpret "length"!

In 1780 growing disquiet about political tendencies and the reverses in America led to the Petition Movement. An association was formed in Yorkshire which sent a petition to the Commons. Other counties joined in with similar associations and petitions. This movement, unlike that which centred round the controversial figure of John Wilkes, "really did seem to do what it claimed to do, to speak for the honoured but hitherto ineffective men of county influence. Such an energizing of squires was made possible only by an almost universal feeling of mingled shame and doubt which the collapse of national prestige had brought about". (J. S. Watson in "The Reign of George III"). Samuel Rush, High Sheriff of Suffolk, announced in February 1780 a meeting of Noblemen, Gentlemen, Clergy and Freeholders of the County, at Stowmarket. The public letter requesting the meeting instanced "... the increasing taxes, misapplication of public money, unmerited Pensions and exhorbitant Salaries of Sinecure Places". Amongst the twenty-seven signatures to this letter were three from Beccles — those of William Bohun, Bence Sparrow and Robert Sparrow. A letter of Peter Routh to Martin (dated March 20th, 1780) shows a sequel. "Rev. Mr. Dawson (Rector of Ringsfield) who, excepting the Sparrows, was sole representative of this Town and neighbourhood — and the latter being both absent he is now the sole agent for solliciting subscriptions among us — the work goes on accordingly, notwithstanding a letter from the Squire to the Landowners of Beccles to enforce his persuasions — even Mr. Elmy remains inflexible". We see here the way in which Robert Sparrow tried to use his local influence — and the landowners of Beccles resisting that influence. There is concealed humour in the reference to Mr. Elmy, for his eldest daughter Harriet had married Bence Sparrow and this was a match decidedly above the expectations of the respectable but socially modest and rather impecunious Elmys; so that Mr. Elmy's inflexibility in conformity with his friends in Beccles was perhaps accompanied by uneasiness at the thought of his son-in-law's displeasure, not to mention the displeasure of that son-in-law's more formidable relation, the Squire!

Two years later, Robert Sparrow seems to have used his influence with greater success. Another meeting was held at Stowmarket, this time to launch a scheme whereby the people of Suffolk would pay for the building of a warship. The scheme was sponsored by the nobility and principal landed gentry of the county. The first meeting was held in August and by the time of the second one in September, £17,500 had already been gathered, the principal subscribers being —

Lord Bristol £1,000
Lord Cornwallis and Sir G. Vanneck £500 each
Sir J. Rous, Sir C. Bunbury, Sir C. Danvers £300 each
Sir T. Gooch £200

Robert Sparrow, J.P., of Worlingham Hall

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Robert Sparrow and sixteen others £100 each.
There was an unusually large number of subscribers from Beccles — 63 —whereas in Bungay, to which Sparrow's influence did not extend, there were only ten! Rev. Bence Sparrow headed the Beccles list with £25. Thomas Rede and Le Grice Browne, attorneys, also contributed £25 each. Others included Isaac Blowers (draper) £21, T Purvis (surgeon) 6 guineas, O. Holmes (grocer) 3 guineas, Robert Davey (schoolmaster) 1 guinea. Rev. Peter Routh gave 5 guineas.

A document showing Sparrow's activity at that period of stress and fear when England began the long conflict with revolutionary France is preserved in the Rix Collection —

"At a Meeting of the Gentlemen, Clergy, Merchants, Tradesmen and Farmers of the Hundred of Wangford in the County of Suffolk, holden at the Town Hall in Beccles in the said County on Monday, the 17th Day of December, 1792.

ROBERT SPARROW Esq. in the Chair

The following Considerations and Resolutions were entered upon:

That it is the sense of this Meeting that a Constitution consisting of a Government of King, Lords and Commons, in which the power of each branch is so equally poised, that no one can press upon the others, is the most free and perfect the good sense and ingenuity of man can contrive.

That this form of Government has, by the particular bounty of Providence, been long established in these kingdoms: that our ancestors have struggled to acquire and to maintain it at the expense of their properties, and their lives, until they at last confirmed it, in full excellence at the glorious Revolution in 1688: that it is equally dear to us; that we hold ourselves equally bound to maintain it; and that we also will, at the hazard of our properties and lives, if necessary, struggle to deliver it down to our posterity, free and pure as we have received it".

This strong and uncompromising statement was to launch a local Society to preserve the Constitution. Many such Societies sprang up at this time: a similar one was formed in nearby Bungay. On December 5th, 1792, the mayor, sheriffs and seventeen aldermen of Norwich pledged themselves to support the constitution of King, Lords and Commons, as established in 1688. Meetings of the inhabitants were also held in Yarmouth, Lynn, etc., and declarations of loyalty and attachment to the constitution were unanimously agreed to and signed. The deep fear which the French Revolution had inspired, reinforced by memories of the Gordon Riots in London in 1780 and of numerous sporadic riots over the previous twenty years in East Anglia, can be felt in the final statement agreed at the Beccles meeting —

"That we are sensible horrid plans have been laid to overturn this happy Constitution, by men deep and black in design, who, despairing to stir up any other sensation than that of horror with the sensible and enlightened part of the kingdom, descend into cottages and cellars there to instill their principles of dissatisfaction: and to work confusion in the minds of the ignorant and unwary, and that

they may stir them up to acts of treason and rebellion, for their own dark purposes, deceiving them by false reasoning, which they cannot understand, alarming them by fears, which are without a cause, and deluding them with flattering promises, they are in no instance able to make good, whom, after they have used for the base designs of Sedition, Riot and Plunder, they mean to, and must inevitably, leave in a deeper state of misery than they found, with the horror of accumulated guilt, and the dread of a tremendous punishment".

Duplicates of these Resolutions were left for signature at the King's Head in Beccles and the King's Head in Bungay. Subscriptions not exceeding half a guinea were received at the Bank of Messrs. Rede, Farr and Smith in Beccles.

Sparrow was the chief promoter of this Society for preserving the constitution. But he was also concerned in the efforts of the prominent landowners to safeguard the wages of farm labourers at a time when food prices were beginning to rise, as a document dated Dec. 22, 1792 shows —

"Whereas at the Easter Quarter Sessions holden at Beccles in the County of Suffolk in the year 1791 an order was made for the increase of the wages of labourers which does not seem to have been uniformily complied with, we, Sir E. Bacon, Sir Thom. Gooch Bart, Robert Sparrow, Thomas Jenkinson Woodward, John Farr Esq., Edward Holden Clerk and Thomas Rede, Robert Rede Gents met here by appointment this day to take into consideration the State of the poor and to point out what mode of relief may be brought forward do therefore hereby give notice that we will enforce the said order in every instance that shall come within our knowledge. The rate of labour in pursuance of the said order is as follows:

From Nov. 5 to Feb. 12 — 1. 2 per day
„ Feb. 12 to April 5 — 1. 4 „ „
„ April 5 to Harvest — 1. 6 „ „
„ Harvest to Nov. 5 — 1. 4 „ „

And we taking the state of the Poor into our consideration in these times of dearness of all articles of food and clothing, do recommend to the several parishes within this hundred, that the overseers of the Poor call a meeting of the principal inhabitants, and then and there form an estimate of the quantity of wheat necessary for the consumption of the poor of all Denominations within their respective parishes.

That they do agree to provide for them good wheat at 5/- a bushel or meal in proportion whenever the price of wheat shall exceed 20/- a coomb, the extra price of such wheat to be paid by each parish and to be raised by the poor rate.

And we declare that we will promote the above plan to the utmost of our powers in all parishes where we have any property.

We also recommend to parishes not to call upon labourers or poor to contribute either by work or payment of money to the repairs of the highways.

We also further earnestly recommend to all farmers and other housekeepers to set example of good and moral behaviour in their respective families.

Not to take any servants without characters from their former service.

To insist on uniform good behaviour in their respective families from their servants by sobriety, decency and staying at home particularly on the Sunday after Divine Service at which masters should see that their servants and labourers do indispensably attend. Masters, in consequence of any failure, to make immediate application to a Magistrate.

It is also recommended to landowners and tenants to lay a small piece of land to each cottage at a reasonable rent consisting of not less than half an acre.

In every circumstance to bring forward complaints against all persons retailing Gin without a Licence from the Excise".

This declaration, which at the beginning shows the landowners compelling the farmers to pay an increase to their labourers, and at the end attempting to support the Excise in its struggle against smuggling, is evidence also of a changing moral climate. A swing of the moral pendulum against the licence of the eighteenth century was proceeding; the insistence on attendance at church is significant.

Sparrow was himself a keen Churchman. Moreover, his extensive influence included the Patronage of the livings of Beccles, Redisham, Ellough, Henstead, Willingham and Pakefield; and during the last forty years of Sparrow's life, the living of Beccles was held by his brother. He was also Lord of the Manor of Beccles, a position of comparatively little power by the end of the eighteenth century, but nevertheless carrying great traditional prestige. It is significant that he did not himself attend at the sessions of the Manorial Court at Beccles, when appointments were made to such local offices as those of Headboroughs, Ale-founders and Flesh-searchers, concerned with law and order, the testing of ale and the examination of meat sold in the market. And indeed he was, it seems, absent from the town some part of each year either in London and visiting his children or on pleasure bent — as in 1798 when the list of social notabilities arriving for the season in Yarmouth includes the names of Robert Sparrow Esq. and Miss Sparrow. Whether he regularly attended the Assemblies at Beccles of the polite society of the locality is uncertain: his name does not appear as a Steward (though that of his colleague for many years at Beccles Quarter Sessions, John Farr, frequently does). But there is evidence in Peter Routh's letters that he attended the Gentlemen's Saturday Club at the King's Head.

The increase of an estate was often a prime object to the eighteenth century land-owner. Sparrow increased his by the purchase of the land he rented from Beccles Corporation. This transaction — with its bargaining and Sparrow's dilatoriness in payment — is described in the chapter on the Corporation, and his extensive enclosures of land during the Napoleonic Wars are mentioned in Chapter 19. The marriages of his son and daughter, too, added to the social consequence of the family. The son, who attained the rank of General, married Olivia, daughter of the first Earl of Gosford.

(She was a friend and correspondent of Hannah More.) The daughter married the 2nd Earl of Gosford, her brother-in-law, thus doubly uniting the two families.

Through the greater part of a long and active life — he died in 1821 aged 80 — Robert Sparrow enjoyed all the power and influence which the landed gentleman could possess. He was the largest landowner and landlord near Beccles; he was Lord of the Manor; he was a J.P. and Chairman of Quarter Sessions; he was patron of the living of the parish church and of five other livings nearby.

Two very different accounts of his character survive. The memoir in Rix's "Fauconberge Memorial" reads: "Courteous to neighbouring gentlemen; to all most hospitable; in his deportment a thorough English gentleman . . . he showed consideration for the poor . . . very many of the principal improvements in the neighbourhood owe their origin to his influence as chairman of the sessions". Turner concludes his eulogy by referring to the ardent devotion to Sparrow of his son-in-law, the Earl of Gosford. From this one might suppose Sparrow to have been ideally suited to the position he occupied in society. But a different picture emerges from the account given by Henry Read (the "Enterprising Landagent" of Chapter 20) — "Mr. Sparrow was a man of considerable abilities, but wanted to make everyone afraid of him — haughty, imperious and selfish. His first wife was a daughter of Sir Robert Barnard of Brampton; by her he had General Sparrow and Lady Gosford. She was a match for him. They lived some few years together and then parted. His second wife was a Miss Rand, by whom there were no children. She was subservient and he governed her severely. His third wife was the widow of Rev. Mr. Perry near St. Ives. She was shrewd, but low and somewhat deformed. She had £500 a year settled on her for life. They soon parted.

He had many peculiarities and amongst the rest would make assertions quite contrary to the fact without once moving a visible muscle. I remember being at the Crown Inn, Huntingdon, one day when he and his groom Sam returned at six o'clock in the evening, after having been on horseback at least ten hours without eating or drinking. I shall never forget the serious and positive look he gave Sam, when he addressed him in the following words: 'Sam, you are a positive beast; you are always eating and drinking and will shortly be as fat as a bacon hog'. Poor Sam was so exhaused from want of food he could scarcely stand".

These two different accounts are not hard to reconcile; for Turner knew Sparrow as he appeared to his social equals, whilst Read knew him in his dealings with subordinates. The position to which Sparrow gave ability, energy and conscientiousness nourished excessive pride — the pride of rank, wealth and influence which Jane Austen consistently represents (with the splendid exception of Mr. Knightley) as the vice of the gentlemen-landowners. Robert Sparrow seems to have been much like Jane Austen's General Tilney; and even more like Squire Bolt in "The Dumb Orators", that masterpiece of Crabbe's sardonic humour —

"Meetings, or public calls, he never missed —
To dictate often, always to assist.
Oft he the clergy joined, and not a cause
Pertain'd to them but he could quote the laws:
He upon tithes and residence display'd
A fund of knowledge for the hearer's aid;
And could on glebe and farming, wool and grain,
A long discourse, without a pause, maintain . . . . "

One other notable activity of Robert Sparrow deserves mention: his part in attempting to lessen the terrible toll of the sea. Shipwrecks off the Norfolk-Suffolk coast were common; countless lives were lost. There was a particularly dreadful storm in December 1770, when 25 to 30 ships were lost off Lowestoft and some two hundred sailors drowned. Helpless spectators on land saw men take desperately to masts and rigging, and often eight or ten perished together. Sparrow and the Rector of Lowestoft raised a subscription and bought a life-boat. It did not, unfortunately, prove a success, for the seamen declared it could not be launched off the beach in a heavy surf; but in 1807 Lionel Lukin produced a design for an unimmergible boat. It was built at Lowestoft and was the world's first sailing lifeboat. In the next 43 years it saved 300 lives. Meanwhile the Suffolk Humane Society had been founded in 1806, with Lord Rous as President and Robert Sparrow one of several Vice-Presidents. "The Lowestoft Guide" (1812) singled him out for special praise — "a gentleman who not only bestowed a very handsome donation, but lent his personal assistance, and was indefatigable in his exertions towards the establishment of the life-boat".

Sparrow was already middle-aged when the long war began; but he was unlikely to shirk a duty which gave him an opportunity of local leadership. In 1805, when over 60, he was gazetted as Captain of the 5th Troop of Suffolk Yeoman Cavalry.

CHAPTER IV.

The Clergyman-Schoolmaster

"These papers were found in an old tin box, filled with documents referring to College Benefices, etc., on July 3rd, 1935. The box had exidently been long stored in the Bursary . . . . . "

This note is prefixed to a collection of manuscripts in the Library of Magdalen College, Oxford, concerning the life of Dr. Martin

Joseph Routh, for over sixty years President of the College. Martin Routh's father was Rev. Peter Routh; the greater part of the material consists of letters from father to son. Peter Routh was Rector of Beccles from 1764-74 and Master of the Fauconberge School from 1770-1794, having also conducted a private school in the town prior to the Fauconberge appointment.

The letters are all that remain of what must have been a fairly regular correspondence for almost thirty years. Some are faded, some are torn and most are written in narrowly spaced lines, so that the maximum information — or exhortation — could be conveyed on a single sheet. They reveal much about some aspects of university life towards the end of the eighteenth century and about the domestic life of a country clergyman; and they contain many details of social and other activities in Beccles. They reveal also an interesting and attractive personality.

Peter Routh was a Master of Arts of Caius College, Cambridge. In 1753 he was appointed to the livings of St. Margaret and St. Peter, South Elmham. He moved to Beccles in 1758 to take charge of the school formerly in the care of Rev. John Lodington, sometime Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. Four children had already been born to his wife Mary before he became Rector of Beccles in 1764, to hold that living until such time as Bence Sparrow was ready to take it over. He held the Beccles living for ten years only, but retained the South Elmham livings until his death in 1802; and he also enjoyed the living of Wicklewood in Norfolk. Whilst Rector of Beccles he held Great Redisham, which Bence Sparrow succeeded to in 1774. After that he acted for a few years as Curate at Beccles, besides being Curate at Weston in 1784-86. Thus he was very much a pluralist. So were many of the neighbouring clergy. There is nothing in his letters to show that he thought this at all wrong. On the contrary, the system whereby a clergyman could hold several livings, paying a curate to perform the duties when he could not perform them himself, seemed to him the only way in which a clergyman — at any rate a clergyman with a large family to support and provide for — could live in tolerable comfort and in a manner befitting his station. He paid a curate to do the duty at Wicklewood, whilst he himself acted as curate — for instance at Weston — to another incumbent. After he had perforce made way for Bence Sparrow at Beccles, he was constantly hoping to secure some other living besides the two he still held. There is a revealing letter written in 1785 to his son (when the latter was well established as tutor and Proctor at Magdalen, but not yet President) concerning the living of Henstead. "Mr. Chase died last night and I have written to the Chancellor and to the Bishop of St. David's submitting it to his judgment entirely whether he can forward my success by interposing. You seem to design some aid in the affair. But do not by any means hazard any prospects of your own advance — my post is in no consideration of such importance to the family — the difference it would make in my circumstances being not very great". Poor Mr. Chase had scarcely breathed his last before Peter Routh opened his campaign! It was

not successful. Again, in 1791, he writes to Martin about his friend the Rector of Worlingham (Worlingham being a Crown appointment, and Thurlow the Chancellor at this time) "..... poor Tom Boyce is not expected to live many days — I have a great reluctance to reviving any degree of expectancy after feeling myself sore from former disappointments. But is it impossible that Mr. Thurlow should now perform what he once undertook to do when Mr. Leech should vacate Cove?" Mr. Thurlow, however, did not oblige.

For these almost desperate efforts to increase his income Peter Routh had a powerful motive. Two children died in infancy — but there were no less than eleven more! He sent the two sons of greatest academic ability to Oxford and the eldest daughter, Mary, served a five-year apprenticeship at a girls' school in Beccles for which her father paid sixty guineas. His income was stretched to the limit to give these children a good start in life, but the educational investment paid excellent dividends. Martin Routh achieved great academic distinction. Samuel won a fellowship; and Mary maintained a profitable girls' school near Norwich.

Martin was at the Fauconberge School under his father until the age of fifteen and in 1770 was admitted to Magdalen. Samuel matriculated at Queen's in 1782 aged seventeen and after a year there, joined Martin at Magdalen. The father was pleased by Samuel's move from Queen's, "Since I perceived by his talk that the Commoners there are in the highest stile of Living and he seems not to be so much impressed as I could wish with a sense of the impropriety of any emulation on his part". He expected his sons at the university to live simply and as economically as possible, to work to the limits of their capacities, and to cultivate assiduously any connections which might lead to preferment.

Many scathing criticisms of the universities at this period were made by contemporaries. Gibbon wrote: "To the university I acknowledged no obligation ... the months I spent at Magdalen proved the most idle and unprofitable of my whole life". This was earlier in the century; but similar criticisms continued to be made. Idleness, extravagance and debauchery were rife amongst the wealthier undergraduates to whom a degree was of no real importance. It was otherwise with those to whom academic success was a pre-requisite to any preferment; and the majority of under-graduates were destined for the Church. Shortly after Martin had arrived at Magdalen, his father sent a letter of advice, principally about the routine of study: "... you may remember what I said of the Expediency of allotting the time from Chapel to Lectures not ordinarily to breakfasting in company, but to the severer kinds of study, in which, if you are not otherwise directed, as a Cambridge scholar I must recommend Locke's Essay to be seriously and repeatedly read and epitomized, but not without Dr. Watt's Philosophical Essays to guide against some ill prejudices apt to be contracted from the former. The next division of time that you can with most constancy engage to study in, I would have appropriated to Latin and Greek, with a full proportion of the

latter, because you are like to be but little furthered in it by the College exercises. English reading of all sorts but what I mentioned under the first article, I used myself when at the University to reserve for such evenings as I spent alone". But Martin needed little encouragement to study and some years later his father and his friends were urging him, when he suffered from sleeplessness, to modify his sedentary and too studious ways. Riding was recommended by Dr. Assey, the family doctor at Beccles.

Two other aspects of university life are touched upon in the letters. Peter Routh constantly urges his son to strict economy. ".... You talk of a coal bill. Was that not included in the Article of Bedmaker £2.0.2? or what other concerns can you have with for that to amount to so much? Your washerwoman's bill is also included in your Tutor's accompt, 0.18.4. which is a mistake that you must get rectified, as you say you paid your Laundress yourself up to December". The fees paid by Martin for his degree were £3.6.8. When in 1786 he took his B.D. he had to pay £12.17.4. The cost of cloth purchased in Beccles in 1777 is seen in:

"Mr. Blower's Bill

Buttons	0	3	10
Suit of Cloaths and Great Coat	5	16	$7\frac{1}{2}$
Breeches	0	11	6
Cloth for Shirts and Stocks	1	10	0
	8	13	$5\frac{1}{2}$

Other Bills were:

Soanes for Shoes	1	5	0
Lancaster for a Hat	0	14	0

Many are the references in the letters to expenses and it is evident that, even with strict economy, life at Oxford was an expensive business.

The third aspect of university life illustrated by the letters is the importance of making and cultivating the right connections. This was not a question of social distinctions, but of improving prospects of preferment either at the university or in the church. Peter Routh urges his son not to neglect opportunities of making his ability known to influential men; and when Martin visits Cambridge, he admonishes "Do not neglect my proper commendations to all in due order". The son succeeded beyond his father's hopes. His election to the Presidency of Magdalen in 1791 was a family red-letter day.

Martin Routh became a great scholar. He issued the prospectus of his huge undertaking, the "Reliquae Sacrae" in 1788. Not until 1814 did the first two volumes appear, followed by two more in 1815 and 1818. A good deal of material was collected for him by friends when visiting foreign countries. William Boycatt, who had been with Martin at the Fauconberge School, wrote to Peter Routh an amusing account of collecting material from Dresden in 1793 — "I went immediately to the Library and I found with difficulty some of the

Rev. Peter Routh

MSS which the President has requested copies of . . . but I found too at the same time what I have more shame in confessing to you than to any other, that it was impossible for me to execute the commission myself". The commission was to transcribe accurately the Greek original — and Boycatt had no doubt studied Greek under Peter Routh's direction. However, Boycatt found the Director of the Library, Baron von Surieten, quite willing to undertake the task, and he was able to go for a fortnight to a gentleman's seat in the country. On his return, the work had been completed . . . "as to cost, it has cost me some of the most civil speeches that I think I ever made in French: those the President may pay me in Latin if he will; it has cost me moreover a great deal in handsome bows; I have bow'd and speechified to all that were concerned in the business, even to the fellow that sweeps the room. I don't see how the President can pay me these bows, for if he goes as low and deep as I did the last time to the Baron he will stand a chance of losing his wig and that you know would be infra dignitatum".

Peter Routh maintained a strong interest in his son's academic labours, but at Beccles his access to learned works was limited, though he had his own library. There were Book Clubs at Beccles and Bungay. There was one at Lowestoft, which he joined without much benefit, and another at Halesworth — "which promises a much more liberal supply", he wrote in 1781. References to matters of current theology often occur in the letters. Nor were Martin and his father the only men of learning in the family, for Samuel, the sixth son, was also a Fellow of Magdalen; and though we may ascribe this honour partly to his brother's influence, there is evidence that he had studied assiduously — a course his father constantly urged upon him. Elizabeth, the second daughter, wrote some neat verses on Joseph Priestley which her father thought good enough to quote in a letter to Martin.

Peter Routh was a more scholarly man than the majority of eighteenth century parsons. Arthur Young, who knew Suffolk and its clergy very well, recorded in his Diary for 1801: "Dined with Mr. and Mrs. Balgrave. Balgrave is a good-tempered Suffolk parson, neglects the duty of his church, idle, indolent, drinks his bottle of port and reads his newspaper, but what is called a respectable character, no vices, nor any imprudent follies". A clerical acquaintance of Peter Routh became bankrupt. "Our old friend Mr. Heyhoe has outrun the Constable most egregiously. I was told by a relation of his that he had shut himself up only a week before he had five thousand brought in against him — I suppose more than the amount of his whole property". Several years later a notice appeared in "The Norwich Mercury" stating that the debts of Rev. Grigson Heyhoe would be discharged on application to John Morphew, Norwich. A lurid picture of the dissipation of some Suffolk clergymen in the early years of the next century is given in Ritchie's "East Anglia". "When the library of one was sold, it was found to contain only one book that could be called theological, and the title of that wonderfully

unique volume was "Die and be Damned; or, An End to the Methodists". It was of him that the clerk said "next Sunday there would be no Divine Service, as master was going to Newmarket." and, according to popular fame, he was more than a spiritual father to many of his parishioners"! No doubt Ritchie's account is partial; he was a Dissenting minister at a time when the antipathy between Church and Chapel was at its height. Probably there was much laxity amongst the Suffolk clergy; but a very different aspect of their lives and activities is seen in Peter Routh and in several of his neighbours — men of learning and culture, some of whom had literary aspirations. Routh's friend at Worlingham, Rev. Thomas Boyce, completed in 1776 a tragedy 'Harold' and had hopes of seeing it accepted by Sheridan. Routh refers to his ill-success thus: "Mr. Boyce has met with a rub about his play, Mr. Cumberland having gotten the start of him with the Battle of Hastings. He had a meeting with Sheridan who fairly owned that the other had such interest that he could not refuse him a preference ... Mr. Boyce can boast of no influence in town". Whatever the merit of Boyce's work, it is hardly surprising that he had no success with it when Cumberland, one of the most popular dramatists of the time, had taken the same subject.

Routh's successor at the Fauconberge School, Rev. John Girdlestone, translated the Odes of Pindar. Rev. William Clubbe of Brandeston, a connection by marriage of the Crowfoot family, wrote several works of prose and verse. Rev. Samuel Cooper of Yarmouth was a voluminous writer. His published sermons included: "The Consistency of Man's Free-Agency with God's Fore-Knowledge in the Government of the World" (1789) and "Necessity and Duty of the early instruction of Children in the Christian Religion" (1790). A sermon on "The established Mode of Subscription vindicated", preached at the Archdeacon's Visitation in Beccles by Rev. John Bellward of Burgh Castle, a close friend of Peter Routh, was published in 1774. Moreover, the number of clergymen in the locality who made their living wholly or partly by teaching was considerable and was increasing. An example is "Rev. James W. Newton M.A. has opened a Day School at Wrentham: English, Writing, Arithmetic and Classics ... he also has accommodation for four young Gentlemen boarders ... Board, Washing and Mending for 20£ per annum and two guineas entrance".

Routh himself was an outstanding example of the clergyman-schoolmaster. His humour often smacks of the classroom. A letter to Samuel, who had just matriculated at Queen's, Oxford, at the age of seventeen, has this passage: "I am to tell you that you have set down Ten Shirts only but took eleven with you. You seem somewhat uncertain whether your bed has been *laid* or *lain* in, the latter without doubt unless something offensive has been left there. For "lain" is the participle of "Lie" and "laid" of "Lay", which in such a case might be used of Hens laying eggs etc. Your addition of "obliged" to "dutiful son" is an innovation in style without improvement and its standing alone in your Letter to your Mother had an awkward

appearance". The note of dry but not unkindly sarcasm found in this letter to Samuel is absent from the letters to Martin. Martin gave his father no uneasiness, apart from concern lest his rigorous studies and sedentary habits should affect his health. Samuel, on the other hand, sometimes chafed under academic discipline. When he was for a brief spell curate at Wotton, his father wrote to Martin: "I am sorry also I have to observe that Sam is not so well satisfied as I thought he might have been, but complains both of loneliness and deficiency of finances". However, Samuel created a favourable impression in Beccles church. "He has read prayers here repeatedly and acquitted himself mighty well".

But Samuel's small crop of wild oats was the least of the parental anxieties. Simon Peter, the second son, was a constant worry. He seems to have been mentally unbalanced. No settled occupation could be found for him. He was "subject to captious humours and violent fits of resentment with occasional depression of Spirits". One of Mrs. Routh's letters has this melancholy reflection ... "we could not reconcile ourselves to sending him to a mad house". Later he seems to have made a partial recovery and to have led a semi-invalid life.

Robert, the third son, had a severe attack of rheumatic fever when twenty-three, during which he lost all the use of hands and feet, but he recovered sufficiently to carry on business at Yarmouth. He married and had one little boy. But two years later there was a domestic scandal. "The character of his Wife was become so very vile in the neighbourhood", wrote Peter Routh to Martin, "and the indications of guilt so notorious ... that nothing less than an immediate separation could be thought of by his friends to save his own credit as a tradesman, as well as in other respects secure his property and make his life tolerably comfortable". There is no evidence of any reconciliation. And the little boy died.

Another son, John William, referred to as 'Jacky', was also a cause of anxiety. He seems to have been employed for brief periods in Chelmsford, London and Coventry, but could not settle down. He died before reaching the age of twenty-five.

Mary, the eldest daughter, after a five years apprenticeship at Mrs. O'Brien's school in Beccles, opened her own school near Norwich, where she was helped by the third daughter, Sarah, and perhaps by the second one, Elizabeth, after the latter — against her father's wishes — had made a brief trial of trade. "Betsy since your leaving us", wrote Peter Routh to Martin, "took it strongly in her fancy to be put apprentice to a Milliner. This you know I had no great liking to, as the prospect is not without something of a shock to begin Trade". The social attitude of the time is seen in Rev. Routh's having no objection to his sons being in trade, but thinking it quite a different matter for a daughter to do the same. His wife was the daughter of a substantial draper at Harleston, Robert Reynolds. Drapery was an eminently respectable trade; and Mary Routh was first cousin to Reginald Heber, afterwards Bishop of Calcutta, and author of several famous hymns. But Elizabeth's venture did not

last long — "the Hurry of Business being too much for her Spirits and what will be fixed upon next is uncertain".

Sophia, the fourth daughter, helped her mother at Beccles until she went to keep house for Martin at Magdalen. She married a well-to-do clergyman, Rev. Dr. Sheppard.

The two youngest daughters both died in infancy.

Domestic joys and, much more, domestic cares occupy a large part of Peter Routh's letters. But he also liked to give his sons local news and gossip. "Beccles has been very lively in the cards and dancing way", he wrote in 1781, "and it is said with the effect of bringing on a match between Bevil Chamber and the youngest Miss Eisdale, which is shortly expected. Miss Elmy is to be married it seems very soon to Mr. Kedington near Bury, who was to have had Anna Maria Brundish". When this wedding took place, Peter Routh referred with sarcastic humour to Mr. Elmy's delight at his daughter's socially advantageous match: "Last Tuesday Mr. Elmy derived immensity of satisfaction from the Apotheosis of his Daughter. Lest the rite should be disgraced by inferiority in the sacrificing priest, Mr. Prebendary Wodehouse came over upon the occasion". He himself might have expected to officiate — but a representative of the family of Lord Wodehouse was preferred! Many references to local marriages are made in the letters; and sometimes Peter gently chides his son on his remaining a bachelor: "If you do not exert yourself shortly your friend Boycatt is like to get the start of you at last in the matrimonial chase".

A pleasing incident of Routh's last years in Beccles occurred in 1792. "I have met with an extraordinary instance of Gratitude", he wrote to Martin, "you will be glad to hear of — Bob Whincop, I think you remember at school. I gave him his learning. Being now as I suppose in affluent circumstances as assistant to his uncle at Lynne, he has sent me a present of a pair of silver Candle-sticks, a Snuffer stand — DO. and patent Snuffers, which we judge could cost him little less than £20".

Reminiscences creep into the later letters, as when he writes to Martin in 1795, "For slight sore throats Black Currant Rhob is an effectual and I think no unpleasant remedy — I recollect you and poor Peter under a black currant bush at St. Margaret's perfectly at peace with each other". And there follows news of that wayward son.

These letters show Peter Routh as a diligent faithful priest, visiting his flock and conducting services at his churches without thought of his own comfort on his long journeys (from Beccles to South Elmham is eight miles) "And very seldom it is that I am in the least fatigued after I am home in the evening, though I often wish myself at my journey's end before it is finished". In his paper on "Beccles Men of Other Days", S. W. Rix has this note on Peter Routh as an old man: "I have often heard one of his pupils describe his venerable appearance as he jogged along on his way to his rural parishes, on his quiet pony, and in the costume of the olden time".

CHAPTER V.

The Tradesmen-cum-Civic Dignitary

Isaac Blowers, like John Gilpin, was a prosperous linen-draper. He was also Post Master of Beccles for many years. His father had served the office of Portreeve several times, for the Blowers had long been prominent citizens in Beccles. It is often supposed that a wide social gap existed between the gentry and tradesmen in the eighteenth century. When John Byng stayed at the George in Knutsford in the 1790's he recorded: "In this inn are built assembly and tea rooms of spacious grandeur, where are held monthly assemblies; at which the maid bragged that none but gentility were admitted, but *on no account*, any tradesmen". The career of Isaac Blowers and those of several other Beccles tradesmen of this period show that the gap was readily bridgeable. Blowers was par excellence the tradesman-gentleman.

Heavy drinking and boisterous conviviality were widespread in the eighteenth century. The drunken boorishness of the mid-century, typified by Fielding's Squire Western, was no longer socially acceptable at the end of the century, when George Colman wrote:—

" 'Tis true the country squire of modern days
Is greatly mended, like his roads and ways . .
He is not now, we know
That porker he appeared some years ago:
That swinish, stupid, fattened lord of grounds,
That hog of bumpering capacity:
With far more noise than any of his hounds,
And infinitely less sagacity."

But neither heavy drinking nor drunkenness seem to have diminished, even among the clergy. An amusing anecdote is told of the Rev. John Ives, whilst he was entertaining his patron the Duke of Norfolk at his home in Bungay. They drank four bottles of port after dinner, with the result that his Grace went to sleep in his chair. On awakening, he apologised to his host, who immediately replied, "Not at all, your Grace, whilst you have been asleep I have drunk your health in a bottle of Madeira". Drinking in public was heavy also. J. B. Scott of Bungay was invited, as a boy of 14, to the Portreeve's Feast at Beccles in 1806 and recalled the scene at the King's Head thus: "We did not play cards, although we were much pressed to do so. I think we were more comfortable than those who did, such was the noise and confusion created by the gentlemen who were mostly intoxicated". Scott left with the ladies at 10.15, but the gentlemen then returned to the Assembly Room and their party did not entirely break up till 8 the next morning. Isaac Blowers must

have been present on this occasion. He would not have missed a Portreeve's feast. Whether he remained to the end, however, is doubtful, for in 1806 he was nearly eighty. But certainly he was a man of his time in his fondness for drink. He was fond of company; he was fond of late hours; he was fond of the bottle. In his diary he recorded many a convivial occasion — "22 Wednesday At half past one rode to dine with Mr. Brewster at Wrentham. Met Mr. Boyce (Mr. Boyce was the Rector of Worlingham), Farr, Le G. Browne, Assey and Diener. Staid ½ p. 9, returned with Assey in Hindes Chaise. Handsome dinner, good port, but drank too much of it. 23 Thursday Aching head and parched lips . . . . "

But the interest of Blowers' Diary would be slight if entries like these were the principal matter. There is much more — much that provides both a striking picture of the life of the well-to-do in a small town and of the character and outlook of an active, sensible and intelligent man of this period.

Isaac Blowers was born in 1727. In his family life he had experienced great sorrow after brief happiness.

"1752. Isaac Blowers did on the 29th day of June commence the most sublime of earthly happiness by Matrimony with Elizabeth the daughter of James and Elizabeth Meen of Weybread, in Linstead Church in the County of Suffolk.

Had issue:

Elizabeth	born 16 July 1753
	baptised on the 18th do.
	died the 1st Nov. 1755.
Isaac	born 20th June 1754
	baptised 21st do.
James Meen	born 22 July 1755
	baptised on the same day
	died on the 23rd July 1755

as did the mother on the 29th of the same month, by the fatal smallpox, aged 22 years, 4 months and 9 days — whose amiable mind was richly adorned with every virtue and every grace. So died the dearest of her sex".

The touching tribute is characteristic of eighteenth century epitaphs; grief is clothed in dignified words and balanced phrases.

The father's sorrows did not end here. The second-born, the boy who bore his father's and grandfather's name, died in 1770 aged 16. Thus was Isaac Blowers left alone. Fond as he was of company, he was not always one of a party. Knowledge of his sorrows gives pathos to the occasional entries in his Diary: "dined solus".

The entries in this Diary in the Rix Collection unfortunately cover only a few years of Blowers' long life. Those for the year 1786 are much the fullest.

It was at this time that Suckling Nelson, brother of Horatio, was an apprentice to Blowers. There survives a letter from Rev. Edmund Nelson thanking Blowers for his kind attention to the lad, and for hospitality when Rev. Nelson stayed at Blowers' home. These extracts contain other examples of Blowers' hospitality:

"Jan. 1. Sunday. Morning snowy. Went to church. Dined at home. Abraham Clarke and his wife Bridget till 4. Afternoon went to church. Tea at Mr. Price's. Returned at 6 to a proposed meeting about Sunday Schools when nobody else appeared. Supped at home with Mr. Marston who staid till 11.

Jan. 2. Dined at Mr. Amyas to celebrate his wedding day. Evening very cheerful and jolly. Played whist, won 2/-. Then danced till near 11. Supped and came ho. about 1.

Jan. 5. Snow very deep. Breakfast and dine at home sol. Tea and evening Mr. and Mrs. Amyas (names of the mixed party of a dozen follow). The major part went away at 12. Mr. Rede and Mr. Assey at 3.

Jan. 6. Frost breaking up. At near 12 Mr. Tyrell Carter the surgeon found the post lad and horse in the ditch by Mr. Amyas' pasture, having (by the road being filled nearly full by the drift of the snow) rode upon the hedge. The horse fell over and in the struggle the horse had forced the lad under him in which situation he was found dead.

Jan. 11. Dined at King's Head Book Club. Subscription for '86 6/-.

Jan. 16. At 3 o'clock to dine at Mr. Rede's. The two Mr. Sparrows etc.. Good dinner, bad wine. Staid till 8, then went to the Assembly at the King's Head — a very good one indeed — 77 — staid till one.

Jan. 22. Evening met on the Sunday Schools.

Feb. 6. Went in the afternoon to see Mr. O'Brien. 8 foot 4 inches high.

Feb. 18. $\frac{3}{4}$ after 10 set out for Norwich (with a mixed party of whom two of the ladies followed in the King's Head chaise). We reached Norwich about 2. Went to the Angel and ordered dinner. Dined cheerfully and went to the play in two coaches. Saw "Venice Preserved" and "The Flitch of Bacon". Returned to the Angel at a quarter past 10. Laid unpleasantly.

Feb. 19. Breakfasted in the Coffee Room. Afterwards with the ladies about 10. About 12 all walked to the Close and up to the Castle hill and set off about 1. Reached home about $\frac{1}{4}$ past 4.

Feb. 26. Sunday. Went to church. Communed. After dinner came in J. Farr, Le G. Brown and two sons. Drank 3 bottles until 5 then went to tea at L.G.B's.

March 11. C. Pearse brought me a very handsome owl for a present which flew away as soon as put in the garden.

March 13. Morning delightful. Took the old walk to Mile-end and thence by Swine's Green. Robt. Rich was married by Mr. Sparrow to Miss Furnish. I went and breakfasted with them at Mr. Browne's. They went off to London at $\frac{3}{4}$ past 11. I rode into Norfolk. On my return found a compliment from the married couple of a handsome pair of kid gloves and piece of cake.

March 27. Being election day for Portreeve, went about 11 to Mr. Arnold's, came up to the hall at 12, elected Mr. Tyrell Carter

Portreeve and his father chief surveyor. Both came to the King's Head to dine. Good dinner. Spent the afternoon and evening till near 1.

March 30. ½ past 3 walked to Mr. Mack's to tea. Mr. Schutz saw me going and came thither; and sent home a lad for a leash of woodcocks for me. He took the lanthorn to his own house; then sent his servant with me to Beccles.

April 4. Evening went to the Portreeve's feast and staid till near 3 o'clock.

April 8. Mrs. Bence sent me a fine pig for a present which I cooked for dinner. Mr. Temple came to dine, smoked a pipe and staid till ½ p 4. Then dressed and went ½ p 5 to Mr. Safford's for the evening . . . played at whist, won 2/-. Very handsome supper — 21 dishes — staid till 12.

April 27. Morning fine. Rose early. Walked but not far. Breakfasted and packed up my cloakbag and portmanteau for London. At 11 set off for Norwich. Dined at the King's Head. At ¼ p 4 took the mail coach. Supped at Thetford. Arrived without the least disagreeable accident at the Exchange in London exactly as the clock struck 7. Delivered the bags there. Then the coach took up to the White Horse Fetter Lane where my fellow traveller (a stranger) and I breakfasted. After which I took a coach to the Paul's Coffee House where I remained till Wed. 10th May when at 6 in the evening I took the Yarmouth Coach for Bungay where it arrived about 4 on the Thursday at the Three Tuns — where I dined with the passengers. Then took my horse and arrived at my own house at ¼ before 6 — drank tea and supped — in the evening Mr. Mayes came and smoked a friendly pipe.

June 1. Afternoon attended the meeting of the Committee of Governors of the School at the School, where the conduct of Mr. Davy in the management of the Free Boys appeared highly commendable and to his honour and our satisfaction.

June 20. This day my old friend Nash died aged 84.

June 22. Afternoon attended as bearer the funeral of my old friend Nash at Gillingham. Called on Mr. Schutz, Gillingham, walked round the garden, picked some fruit, set them all off for the play at Bungay, then I went to the funeral, and returned at 8. Supped sol. and went to the Widows' Club till 11.

June 28. Rose at 5, very clear and fine; bathed; then walked and set on the haymakers. Forenoon, walked to haymeadow, then came home, dressed and rode with Mr. Safford to the annual meeting at Bungay at ½ p 11 and set off for home at 5 o'clock. I went directly to the haymeadow, found them backward in their business; came home and got a 5 pint bottle of strong beer; carried it up and wrought with them till they cocked all the hay, 9 o'clock; being exceedingly hot put on a dry warm shirt and clothes; supped, smoked a comfortable pipe and then to bed, weary.

June 30. Dine at home sol. after dinner napt for an hour. Then walked again to the meadow sol. Tea at home. Gardened, read and

wrote; supped sol. and smoked a happy consolatory pipe till 10; then up to bed.

July 2. Sunday. Being deaf again from bathing, did not go to Church in the afternoon but read Blair at home.

July 3. Rose at ½ p 6. Attended the workmen; then bathed most delightfully, and walked to Rose Hall and round by the Grove, Peddar's Lane and home by Cross Keys.

July 18. Mrs. Esdaile, Mrs. Farr and Mrs. Cooper looking at the Theatre. I gave them the best information of the construction in my power.

July 23. Dined at the Jubilee. Sir Ed. Bacon in the chair.

July 24. Rose at 6 — bathed — morning fine — read — breakfasted. At 10 I walked with Mr. T. Farr down to the bridge where we embarked on a very agreeable water excursion in Mr. Carpenter's boat, which was very amply served with great abundance of good things. Six handsome rigged sailing boats — fine weather — and general harmony all conspired to make it the best day I ever spent upon the water. We dined at Worlingham dam about 3 and returned to Beccles about 9 — landed at Mr. Lillistone's — and walked with Mr. Amyas into his garden for about half an hour.

July 29. I have in this week spent 6 days in company besides the Club and refused 4 invitations. Thanks to my good friends.

July 30. Rose about 7. Walked to pasture — feelings unpleasant — forenoon went to church.

Aug. 5. John Berry called and looked over the work and measured the ground for the greenhouse. On going out found the key of the foredoor broke by nobody — as were 2 kitchen pokers and the sugar breakers by the *same hand — liars all*. I staid at the Club till near 12.

Aug. 6. Sunday. Rose ¼ p. 6 — morning very fine. I walked to Mile End and round by Swines Green and the Black Boy with young Mr. Hunter and his dogs hunting by Swine's Green. Forenoon went to Church and an Act of Parliament for a sermon from B.S. After Church gave a pretty nervous kitchen lecture upon Nobody's tricks and Somebody's lies — as little minded as B.S's Act of Parliament.

Sept. 1. This day Harry Close and another man were nearly a whole day hanging the dining room door — lazy scoundrels.

Sept. 10. After Church drank tea sol. Then about ¼ p. 6 rode to Lowestoft and walked unto the beach sol. to view the moon's reflection on the ocean. Mr. Ausdel came into the room to me, but giving solitude the preference, I dismissed him — supped and went to bed ½ p. 10.

Sept. 11. Rose at 6 and went unto the beach — waited half an hour for the men to manage the machine — bathed very pleasantly — set off for Beccles ½ p. 7, reached home ¼ p. 9 — Washing day — Dined at home sol. Afternoon read — wrote and domesticated. About 5 drest and went to Mrs. Chambers' route. Played whist, lost 1/-. After tea a proposal was made to see Preslow. Mr. and Mrs. Assey, Mrs. Miller, Miss Sherman, Mr. Miller, Mrs. Boston and self

went — 2/- each — and were most exceedingly astonished at his performance of dexterity. Miss Barbara Pert, a dwarf, was introduced. The exhibition lasted till ½ p. 10.

Sept. 13. Rose ½ p. 6 — bathed in the river though the morning was moist and windy. Ironing day. ½ p. 11 I rode with Mr. Safford to the House of Industry — returned at 2. After dinner, read and wrote — shaved and half dressed to go to Mrs. Whitaker's, but found out that I had not engaged myself — staid at home and made tea for the ironers — wrote for ½ an hour, then altered my dress and about 8 called upon Mr. Crowfoot where I spent the evening and staid till near 2. On coming home found my candle out, so went to bed in the dark.

Sept. 14. Afternoon read — wrote — gardened till 5 — had tea — then rode to Lowestoft where I arrived about 8. Walked unto the beach to view what I had never before seen, a rough sea. Lord — how great, how wonderful! — returned to the inn filled with contemplation — supped sol. and to bed ½ p. 10.

Sept. 18. A prodigious scuffle and bustle upon the plains by a great crowd of people who assembled to see a fight between Hawke and Tripe, which was very properly prevented by Sir Edmund Bacon and Mr. Farr.

Oct. 2. Dined at home solus although fair and sessions day.

Oct. 5. Afternoon gathered bergamot pears and lemon pippins.

Oct. 13. Rose at 7 morning fair — walked — called on Tim Buck and bespoke a pair of leather breeches. After breakfast rode with Mrs. Safford to Worlingham Hall — was very genteelly received and asked to dine there on Wednesday next — agreed — staid about two hours. About 3 went in Mr. Farr's coach to Weston to attend the funeral of Mr. Schutz at Gillingham — reached the hall about ½ p. 6, had wine, tea and coffee — about 9 the funeral procession began in very good order, by waxlights, to move to the Church, where the corpse was interred, after which we returned to the hall and from there we all walked home about ½ p. 10.

Oct. 25. Mr. Pain of London called — paid him my last debt on trade account — Make me, O Lord, I beseech Thee, thankful, as I ought to be, for these, and all Thy many mercies towards me.

Oct. 28. I was sent for and went down to my friend Arnold's, he having this day lost one of the best of wives and women — a very melancholy meeting.

Oct. 31. Afternoon went to attend, as upper bearer, the funeral of Mrs. Arnold, whose benevolence and excellencies as a mother, wife and friend, panegyrick will not do justice to.

Dec. 3. Mr. Ward and Mr. Smith from Yarmouth came at ½ p. 9 — breakfasted — went to Church and being Advent Sunday I fully intended taking the Sacrament but too much complaisance to my company interfered very improperly.

Dec. 6. T. Farr called as I was dressing for the Assembly. About 8 went to Assembly and staid till 2.

Dec. 13. At breakfast Mrs. Fox called and about 11 we went together to offer Mrs. Ann Amyas an apartment at Mrs. Fox's house during the inoculation which is like to take place in Beccles.

Dec. 31. After tea went to the boys' Sunday school and from thence to Mrs. Miller's where I chatted till 8 — then home — supped sol. and spent a happy consolatory evening — went to bed at 11. N.B. My birthday. I now enter my 60th year in exceeding good health. *God be praised.*

It was about this time, as the entry for October 25th indicates, that Blowers retired from business. In April 1787 he had this notice inserted in the "Norwich Mercury" —

"Mr. Blowers being certain that there are many to whom he has not yet been able to make his personal Acknowledgments for their Favours conferred upon him whilst in Trade, he humbly hopes they will accept this (though late) public Testimony of the grateful sense he retains of his Obligations to them, with a firm Assurance of his wish to have it in his Power to render them any Service in future".

He provided a lavish entertainment on his election as Portreeve, for the third time, in 1790. "After divine service, the Portreeve entertained upwards of an hundred of his friends with an excellent dinner, at the New Assembly Room, where many loyal toasts were drunk. In the evening, near an hundred Ladies and Gentlemen went to tea at the Portreeve's house, to whom he gave a ball. About eleven o'clock many of the Gentlemen returned with him to the Assembly Room where a very convivial evening was finished with that hilarity and great good humour which ever characterises the chairman".

Blowers' public work was remarkable. Not only was he a member of the Corporation for sixty years and four times Portreeve; he was also many times a Surveyor of the Fen, an Auditor of the Corporation accounts, a member of many Committees. He was treasurer for the House of Industry at Shipmeadow and treasurer of the Assembly Room. He was a Churchwarden. He was a feoffee. He was postmaster at Beccles for many years. He took an active interest in the Leman and Fauconberge schools and in the Sunday school. There was hardly any local pie in which he did not have his benevolent finger.

Unfortunately, Rix transcribed only a few entries from Blowers' later years; but they have the same emphasis on conviviality in a wide social range. Two entries of 1811 are:—

"Dined in the Assembly Room with 82 members of the Swan Box Club".

"Dined at Worlingham. Met Lord Gosford".

The conviviality which is so marked a feature of the social life recorded here is amusingly illustrated in an entry of 1785 when Blowers entertained a sizeable party at his home —

"A very cheerful evening. The agreeables went off at ½ p. 11 — the more so staid till ½ p. 12 — the jolly till 2". But Blowers was far from being only a man of pleasure. We find him visiting the House of Industry at Shipmeadow to inspect the spinning there; he was a

conscientious governor of the Free School; he supported the new Sunday School — "Went to the lads Sunday school. Gave each 2d.". He again provided lavish entertainment on his election, for the fourth time, as Portreeve in 1803, "A circumstance which had never taken place before in the annals of the Corporation. On this singular event the Day was kept with more than common Festivity. The Portreeve gave a most ellegant Dinner at the Assembly Room to all the Gentlemen and principal Inhabitants in the Vicinity and Town when the utmost Joy and good Humour prevailed. A Ball in the evening was given to the Ladies very much to the satisfaction and pleasure of all who attended it and the Day concluded with a very handsome display of Fireworks in Compliment to Him. He likewise gave a Dinner of roast Beef and plum puddings to all the Free School children and the same to the prisoners, and in gratitude to the Author and giver of long Life and of every other good this respectable and liberal Man presented the Town on this occasion with a very ellegant and costly piece of plate for the Communion Table".

He was not, however, pleased with everything in his native town. An increase in the local rate for Lamps was a cause of annoyance in 1816, when he wrote on the demand paper — "*Shocking,* Oh Corporation how fallen below parr — what a scandalous and abominable Imposition upon the Town of Beccles".

Blowers was a member of the Corporation for upwards of sixty years. After he died in 1819, aged 93, the funeral was preceded by a solemn procession on a route lighted by torches —

"At 6 o'clock the Line to be formed five yards wide after which the Torches will be delivered by the Stewards".

The Meeting Society, the White Swan Society, the Hermitage, Angel and Red Lion Societies all took part.

The epitaph composed by W. Crowfoot concluded — "He was distinguished by an ardent zeal to promote the credit and prosperity of his native town. In his private character he was hospitable and benevolent, giving readily of the abundance he possessed, and seeking upon all occasions to administer relief and comfort to the poor and needy. Reader respect his memory and emulate his virtues".

The convention, so firmly established in the eighteenth century, of long and flattering epitaphs is exemplified here. In this instance the tribute was well deserved. Many friends were remembered in his will; nor were the poor forgotten.

S. W. Rix made an appraisal of the life and character of Blowers from reminiscences of those who had known him: "He may be regarded as the type of the thrifty tradesman of the good old school — that class who passed their early days behind the counter, or at the desk — who rose with the sun — dined at noon and lived upon a sanded floor — who did business more in yellow guineas than bills of exchange and dirty bank notes — who, after long years of toil, managed to retire with the broad stamp of sterling respectability and Christian politeness, and were often admitted, without scruples, to social intercourse with the affluent-born and titled, and spent the

remainder of their days in the thankful enjoyment and kindly distribution of the wealth which they had earned with their own hands and saved by their own prudence".

The last entry Rix noted was for Dec. 31st 1817: "Being the 92nd birthday of Isaac Blowers, many friends came to congratulate and to dine with him".

Blowers' life was one of outstanding local service; yet it was perhaps more typical than unusual for a prosperous tradesman in a market town. His contemporary, Owen Holmes, had a very similar career. Blowers was a draper, Holmes a grocer. They were among the largest rate-payers, with warehouses as well as shops. Holmes was many years a Churchwarden. He was twice portreeve in 50 years of service on the Corporation; he was a Chief Constable of Wangford Hundred and treasurer of the Beccles Society for the prosecution of felons: altogether another pillar of law, order and the established Church.

CHAPTER VI.

The Town Corporation

Violent disputes and much legal wrangling preceded the granting of a Charter to Beccles by Queen Elizabeth. This Charter, ratified on February 3rd 1588 and confirmed by James I in 1605, granted to the Portreeve, Surveyors and Commonalty of Beccles "all that our land, soil, pasture, and fen aforesaid, in Beccles aforesaid, commonly called Beccles Common or Beccles Fen" — an area estimated at 1,400 acres. The Charter laid down that the Corporation should consist of a Portreeve, elected annually, three Surveyors, and a Common Council; and that the Council should consist of thirty-six men, of two classes. "The first of these classes or companies shall be of the principal and more discreet men of the said town to the number of twelve persons only... and the other class, order, or company of persons shall and may for ever hereafter be composed of honest and fit persons, inhabitants of the said town, to the number of twenty-four persons only..."

Such was the constitution of the Corporation at its inception; and such it remained until the passing of the Municipal Corporations Act in 1835. It was a closed Corporation; new members were elected as required, by death or removal from the town, by the other members. When a new member of "the twelve" was required, he was

to be elected by the remaining eleven of the first-class, from the ranks of "the twenty-four"; and when a new member of the "twenty-four" was required, he was to be elected by all the members of the Corporation. Thus it was possible for a man to move from the lower to the higher class, but only when a vacancy occurred by death, removal, or other special cause.

The Portreeve was elected by all the members of the Corporation. He was always one of "the twelve"; and a common practice was election by rotation. Of the men chosen as Portreeve during the period 1760-1815, one served this office four times, six served three times and seventeen served twice (though the years in which they served were in some cases before the first or after the second date).

A notable feature is the dominance throughout the period of doctors and attorneys. They invariably served the minimum period on the 24; as soon as a vacancy occurred they were elected into the 12. Frequently nearly half the 12 were doctors or attorneys. The office of Portreeve was filled fourteen times by surgeons and eleven times by attorneys between 1760 and 1815; tanners and brewers accounted for another ten.

A member of the Corporation had to be elected, in the first instance, to the lower group, "The Twenty-four". Promotion by election to "The Twelve" was certainly not by seniority. Some men were "Twenty-fours" for over twenty years and were never promoted. Others served the minimum of one year in this group and were promoted as soon as a vacancy occurred. On several occasions men elected to "The Twenty-four" were able to join "The Twelve" after one year, and to serve the highest office, that of Portreeve, one or two years afterwards. Thus William Parkinson was elected to The Twelve in 1773 and was Portreeve in 1774. John Assey was elected to The Twenty-four in 1776, to the Twelve in 1777, and was Portreeve in 1779. James Esdaile joined The Twenty-four in 1781, The Twelve in 1783 (as soon as a vacancy occurred) and was Portreeve in 1784. Assey was a surgeon and Esdaile a man of substance, who was designated "Esquire" in the Corporation records, whereas most of the others were merely "Gentlemen".

Once elected to the Corporation, a man remained a member of it for life unless he requested a discharge. This rarely happened. A few retired on account of age or poor health. Only once, in 1768, was a member discharged for non-attendance and on that occasion the man concerned "had several times stated that he would not serve any more". Perhaps he was a man with a grievance, like John Meek who in 1755 had been ordered to make, by advertisement in the Norwich and Ipswich papers, a public apology for "scandalous words spoken by him of this Corporation" — or to be discharged. Meek made his apology.

These closed Corporations of the eighteenth century were often corrupt. It must have been easy for members to promote their own interests and to feather their own nests. On one occasion, in 1772, there was an allegation of corruption against the Corporation of

Beccles. Benjamin Murrill, John Lillistone and others laid information against the Corporation of "illegal and inequitable practices with respect to the management of the Fenn and application of the rents and profits thereof". The Fen was the principal property of the Corporation and the letting of it as pasture provided the Corporation's principal income. The Corporation's defence was put in the hands of Thomas Rede, attorney, its Deputy Steward. The suit was heard in the Court of Chancery in 1774. It dragged on. The following year the Corporation borrowed £150 from Mr. John Ketteridge at 4 per cent. towards payment of Rede's bill of charges. In 1776 a settlement was reached, in the Corporation's favour. Benjamin Murrill and the others agreed to pay to the Corporation £140, in lieu of £198.11.11 awarded as costs to the Defendants "instead of entering into any Litigation as to the proportion to be deducted from the said taxed costs on account of such matters in Question as to which the Court refused to give costs to the Defendants". It appears that the principal cause of complaint had been the enclosures, whereby the land available for those with rights of pastorage on the Common had been much decreased.

The Corporation had difficulties. "Whereas the keeping of Geese upon Beccles Fenn hath been found to be very prejudicial to the feed thereof and injurious to the inhabitants of the Town in general and whereas Complaints having been made by many of the said Inhabitants of the Injurys arising from the said Fenn being surcharged and much overstocked by great number of geese illegally kept and depastured it is adjudged most proper to prohibit the keeping of any Geese thereon". There is no evidence that this prohibition was repealed.

About the middle of the century there had been trouble over infected cattle on the fen. Great numbers of Scotch cattle were annually driven south and from 1739 the Scotch drovers had been granted leave to pasture their cattle on the Fen. Ten years later, some infected Scotch cattle had been offered for sale at fairs and markets in Suffolk "which has occasioned the spreading of the said distemper". Thereafter no more such cattle were allowed on the fen. But there was trouble on several occasions when diseased local cattle were pastured there; in 1778 an order for removal, and for impounding those not removed, was made. Another recurrent problem was how to prevent unauthorised persons from putting their beasts on the fen. In 1782 the Portreeve distrained a bay mare belonging to one Will Westrup who had no right to pasture and who, it was alleged, had several other cattle on the Corporation's land. Several times before there had been attempts to defraud "by colouring cattle" so as to make them appear similar to cattle of men who had a legal right to pasture.

There was an elaborate system of entering in a Book of Warning particulars of all cattle before they were put to pasture. But it must have been an almost impossible task to check all these cattle on such a large common — impossible until the land was enclosed.

Enclosure proceeded during the century. As early as 1733 a survey had been made "to see which land may most conveniently be enclosed and let". The object in this case was to provide money for the salary of the Parish Church organist! Further enclosures took place in 1749, 1762, 1771, 1776, 1795 and 1796. The final enclosure was in 1801, when only the Race Course was left unenclosed.

At the time of the enclosure of 1776, an important revision was made to the rules governing the granting of leases of Corporation land; Lessees were permitted to assign land let to them to other persons including persons not resident in Beccles. The inhabitants to whom land was leased (generally for 21 years) were often tradesmen; and two schoolmasters, Robert Davey and John O'Brien, both held leases.

Improvements in drainage were made during this period of enclosure. To help pay for drainage work in 1766, all persons having the right to pasturage were asked to contribute one shilling for each beast. Enclosure and drainage, though greatly improving the value of the Fen, meant much work in maintenance and repairs. In 1786 it was reported "that great impositions had been made by workmen in repairs to the Fenn"; Samuel Crowe, one of the under surveyors, was appointed to superintend the business of maintenance and repairs at a salary of £5 per annum.

The principal business of the Corporation, then, was getting the maximum income from its land and making the land the greatest benefit of the townspeople — at any rate, of those who had pasturage rights and those who could afford to lease land. What of the poor? Their geese had been banished from 1761. The acreage of common land had been steadily reduced. The poor came off second best. However, some help was given in the cutting of turf for burning — for the poor still burned turf.

"Lo, where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
Lends the light turf that warms the labouring poor".

wrote Crabbe in "The Village" (1783).

In 1762 the Corporation had ordered the enclosing of Rush Fenn "for cutting of turf for use of the poor". When dried, the turf was to be distributed to the poor at the Portreeve's discretion. The following year it was ordered that turf "not exceeding ten thousand" should be cut for the poor annually. There were no further orders about turf cutting. Probably the custom gradually died out, as coal became more widely used. During the early nineteenth century, distribution of "coals for the poor" in winter was often made. In 1880, for example, 50 chaudrons of coal were bought and then sold to the poor at a reduced price.

The Corporation gave considerable financial help to the Church. There were no Dissenters on the Corporation during the eighteenth century. The Churchwardens were always members of the Corporation, sometimes of "The Twelve" and sometimes of "The Twenty-four". When in the 1760's a new peal of bells was purchased for £250, and the Churchwardens (with the authority of the Vestry

meeting) undertook to pay off £30 annually, the Corporation agreed to pay a like sum annually until the debt was discharged. The Corporation paid the salary of the Organist and in 1778 began payment to a choirmaster — "Two guineas to be paid to James Crickmore and his assistants singing Psalms and Anthems weekly in the Church during Divine Service and for his having taught and instructed divers Pupils therein during the past year". An unusual step was taken when Johnson Collins was appointed organist in 1783. Collins was blind. When some alterations were made to the organ soon afterwards, a special payment was made to Mr. Holder, the Bungay organist, to give Collins some help in mastering difficulties. Local benevolence was shown in the arrangement of Assemblies especially for the benefit of Collins during the 1780's. He died in 1793. The following year the Corporation undertook its largest effort on behalf of the Parish Church. An agreement was made with George England of London to take down the old organ and install a new one at an estimated cost of £231. England's bill came finally to £244, to meet which the Corporation borrowed £200 from W. Woodthorpe of Carlton Colville. At the same time, payments to choir boys were begun. Collins' successor, Thomas Pymar, received three guineas for teaching the boys "and half a guinea to each of the boys not exceeding eight as shall attend properly to the Duty thereof". And in 1797 the salary of "the two leading voices" in the Choir was increased to one guinea each. There were several increases in these payments before 1815.

Besides the extensive land belonging to the Corporation which made possible assistance to the Church and other disbursements, there was a much smaller acreage, together with some property, held in trust for the benefit of the town by the Feoffees, one of whom was appointed Collector of the rents annually. New Feoffees, like new members of the Corporation, were elected, when a vacancy occured, by the existing members. Feoffees were invariably members of the Corporation (Dissenters being thereby excluded) with the exception of the Rector who might, and sometimes did, act as Collector. The income at the disposal of the Feoffees was in 1760 about £100 per annum. It increased towards the end of the century with the increase in rents.

When the House of Industry was built (as described in Chapter Seventeen) the Feoffees decided to devote about two-thirds of the income to the Poor Rate. Over £70 was paid annually in this way. This gave relief to the rate-payers, not to the poor, and was a questionable decision; but the practice continued for sixty years. However, the Feoffees retained a substantial sum for disbursement among the poor of the town. The following table shows the outline of the charity:—

Year	*No. of persons relieved*	*No. of widows included*	*Highest Sum given*	*Lowest ditto*	*Total disbursement*
1770	91	30	£1. 5. 0	2. 6d.	£41
1780	147	32	15. 0	1. 0d.	£55

1790	135	37	£1. 5. 0	5. 0d.	£52
1800	156	47	£1. 1. 0	2. 6d.	£55
1810	163	50	£1. 1. 0	2. 6d.	£56
1815	221	57	£1.10. 0	2. 6d.	£98

The money was distributed in December, at the beginning of the period of greatest hardship.

In addition to this, the Feoffees contributed to various local causes. Thus from 1785 they gave from time to time annual sums not exceeding five pounds towards the cost of books for sons of the poor attending the Free School. In 1778 they gave two guineas to James and Benjamin Crickmore for teaching the choir boys in psalmody, an equal sum being provided by the Corporation. They helped Innkeepers burdened with billeting of soldiers. In 1795, a year of great hardship, they contributed £25 to the Rector's subscription for special relief of the necessitous; and at the end of the century they bought coal for sale to the poor at a low price.

Sometimes the cost of helping the Church was shared by the Corporation and the Feoffees. Thus in 1790 they paid £7 each to the cost of a set of new keys for the Church. This particular agreement was made when Isaac Blowers was both Portreeve and a Feoffee at the same time. The contributions of the Feoffees, however, were small in comparison with those of the Corporation. Until the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, when Dissenters were first represented on the council, there was no dispute over the responsibility of the Corporation to assist in the maintenance and improvement of the Parish Church and its services. Substantial sums were spent for this purpose.

It was the duty of the Parish Overseers to find men for the Militia under a ballot system. (In practice, it was usual to find substitutes — presumably from the ample ranks of the paupers.) Thus the Corporation had no responsibility in this matter. Nevertheless, they assisted financially. In 1780 two guineas were provided to assist in finding a substitute and five guineas were given to William Crowfoot "to re-imburse him for hire of one Sam Clarke to serve for the Militia". The following year the Corporation agreed to pay half the cost of substitutes. This was no more than prudent, since otherwise the money must have come from the Church rate, which was fixed annually, and to which members of the Corporation were substantial contributors! During the long war the Corporation provided far larger sums for militia, and local volunteers, both infantry and cavalry — a topic dealt with more fully in the chapter on "The Impact of the Napoleonic War".

The field of Corporation activities was gradually extended during the latter part of the century. Some attention, but not very much, until the end of the century, was given to the paving of the town. In 1758 £20 was paid to Thomas Mills as part of his bill for paving work done in various parts of the town; private individuals must have paid the rest. Thirty years later, it was ordered that the north-west corner of the Old Market "be forthwith heightened, repaired and new paved".

In 1795 the Corporation requested Robert Rede and Jeremiah Smith, attorneys, "to take measures for procuring an Act for the paving, lighting and cleansing of the Town". The Act was passed in the following year, though the intention was that it should not be put into operation "until the present war shall cease". However, in 1799 it was decided to apply to the Commissioners appointed to carry out the provisions of the Act. This was by far the most ambitious and expensive project undertaken by the Corporation for the benefit of the town. Although its income had greatly increased, through the enclosures of land and rising rents, the Corporation had to take an exceptional step. It sold to Robert Sparrow (for £3,000) the whole of the marshes of which he held the lease.

The work was completed in September 1804, when the "Mercury" reported: "The new pavement at Beccles is finished: the centre of the streets with crown pavements, the foot-paths with flagstones, which has greatly increased the neatness of the town".

Beccles was some fifteen years ahead of its neighbour Bungay in carrying through a full paving scheme. Bungay borrowed the money to finance its scheme from its wealthiest citizen, J. B. Scott. It was not unusual for a Town Corporation to borrow from private individuals; indeed until the development of banks, they were the only source of credit. Beccles Corporation frequently borrowed one or two hundred pounds during the last twenty years of the eighteenth century.

Not until 1771 was a collective effort made to provide lighting in the town. In that year "Lamps to enlighten the Parish of Beccles" were bought by subscriptions of seventy citizens. 62 paid 10/6, 24 paid 5/3 and 6 paid 2/6. Fifty lamps were bought. The Corporation undertook the annual expense of trimming, lighting, cleaning and providing oil, which was estimated at £20. More land was enclosed to meet this additional expense. The number of lamps was increased to 100 in 1792 and this time the Corporation paid for them. There is no record of an official Lamplighter until 1807 when an agreement was made with William Stewart to find the oil, light the lamps and maintain them for £86 per annum.

The Corporation thus acknowledged a partial and then a full responsibility for lighting the town. Similarly, it took slow and hesitant steps towards keeping the streets and pavements clear and clean. From 1766 John Roberts, sergeant, was paid one guinea annually "for opening and closing the Cross on Market Day and for cleaning it". Next year the Portreeve was instructed to enquire into "Nuisances and offences against the Public" — and to prosecute if need be. There is no record of any such prosecution, however. Twenty years later, a committee was appointed "to consider cases of Nuisance". It reported that the Market Pump and Well-covering were in poor condition. "Also that a Muck Bin belonging to Mr. Jeremiah Taylor projecting into Newgate Street is extremly noxious and offensive to the Inhabitants of that Street, particularly in the summer season, and that the same ought immediately to be removed.

But whether it was removed, the Corporation records do not show. Nor is there any record of the Pump being repaired at this time.

We have seen the Corporation and the Churchwardens co-operating in Church affairs and in providing Militia substitutes. Their respective fields of action were not clearly divided. The committee of the Corporation had officially reported on the decay of the Pump, but it was the Churchwardens, who at long last, made an arrangement about it with Robert Sparrow, Lord of the Manor, who owned the Pump. In 1807 Sparrow agreed "to grant to the Churchwardens and their successors the use and enjoyment thereof for the term of twenty-one years", the Churchwardens agreeing to keep the Pump and Well in good repair and to pay the nominal sum of 2/6 a year to Sparrow and his heirs. The following year the decrepit Pump and Well were repaired and an arrangement made with a local tradesman to keep them in sound condition for one guinea annually.

The affair of the Pump illustrates the extraordinary dilatoriness of civic action in the eighteenth century.

In another matter, the Corporation acted quickly. "Whereas the Building a publick Room in this Town to answer the purposes of an Assembly Room and Playhouse would as it is apprehended be conducive to the Benefit, Advantage and Prosperity of the Town inasmuch as it would be an Inducement to persons of Independent Fortune to settle and reside therein . . . " is the preamble to a plan of 1785 to raise £600 for the building of an Assembly Room. The money was obtained by subscriptions of £25 each from leading citizens and neighbouring gentry.

This was an extremely important addition to the amenities and to the prestige of the town. It was soon found inadequate to requirements and in 1792 a card room was added at a cost of £105.

Some activities of the Corporation, such as the special help given to the poor during the hard times of the wars and the provision for militia substitutes, are dealt with in the chapter "The Impact of the Napoleonic Wars". "The Scourge of the Smallpox" shows another field of the Corporation's activity.

The idea that the closed Corporation of the eighteenth century was necessarily stagnant and inefficient is not borne out by the records of the Beccles Corporation. These records show a steady increase of activity, accelerating after about 1790. The town lands were enclosed and improved; income was substantially increased. The Assembly Room was built. Lighting and paving schemes were carried through. Whereas in the 1760's no meetings other than the routine quarterly ones were held, later in the century there were often additional meetings. Moreover, the system of appointing Committees to report on particular problems was developed. Committees soon proliferated.

Perhaps this accounts for the sudden increase in resignations "from age and infirmities" during the 1790's. Membership of the Corporation demanded much more time and effort than had been required twenty years earlier.

The following extracts from the records and accounts show some of the miscellaneous activities and expenses of the Corporation not previously mentioned:—

1760	To Rev. Mr. Freeman for a sermon on Audit Day	1- 1- 0
	To the Ringers on Election and Audit Days	1-11- 6
	Paid the Mole-catcher	1- 0- 0
	„ to 39 Poor Persons	1-19- 0
	To Bakers for Bread for the Poor	5- 8- 0
	To the Surveyors their Boot Money	2- 0- 0
	To Mr. Crowfoot his salary as Organist	20- 0- 0
	(All these were regular annual payments, though the amount paid to the Poor and to the Bakers varied from year to year.)	
1761	To Thos. Baxter for Fireworks at the Coronation	7- 7- 0
1762	203 loads of Gravel at 11/-	10- 3- 0
	(Gravel for the roads was required most years. The amount varied considerably.)	
1763	Received of the Rope Dancers for the use of the Hall	1- 1- 0
1765	New Town Hall or Shire Hall to be built for the use of Justices of the Peace and for Corporation business.	
1766	For sweeping the Pesthouse chimneys	1- 6
	Paid Goode's wife for gathering 7 loads of stone	7- 0
1772	Paid John Woods for Oil for the Lamps	28-15-8¼
	(This was the first of such annual payments, which greatly increased later in the century.)	
1776	To Mr. Chase for advertising Robberies	9- 2
1776	For James, son of Dorothy Clark, bound apprentice to Tim Buck	3- 0- 0
	For James, son of John Ayers, do Nick Ingate	3- 0- 0
	(There are no other similar entries.)	
1782	Received of Capt. Wade of the West Norfolk Militia for nine Glass Lamps broke wantonly by a party of young Gentlemen from Yarmouth on the evening of 25th of Dec.	12-12- 0
	Paid C.D. for Information of A.B's breaking of Glass Lamp	1- 1- 0
	Paid D.E. for Information relative to Cattle illegally turned on the Fenn	10- 6
	The Pesthouse to be tiled and repaired.	
1783	Thomas Press "a poor industrious inhabitant", excused the payment of two guineas arrears of rent, he having the misfortune to break one of his limbs	
	(Press was a Dissenter)	

1787	Received of Mr. Barrett a year's rent of the Theatre (Barrett was Manager of the Norwich Company. He was often a year or two in arrears in paying this rent.)	21- 0- 0
1788	To Mr. Davey the Premium for Insuring the Theatre	1- 6- 0
	To A.B. for information of Nudd's having turned upon the Common cattle which were not his own	1- 1- 0
	Nudd's fine	3- 3- 0
1789	Paid to Rev. Bence Sparrow for support of the Sunday Schools	4- 4- 0
	Paid Thos. Baxter for preparing fireworks "to celebrate the King's recovery from his late indisposition"	5- 5- 0
	Permission granted to Inhabitants to take sand from the Hill (part of the Common) at 3d a cartload	
	John Cunningham the scavanger	1- 0- 0
1790	Paid towards a wheelbarrow for the scavanger	5- 0
1791	Received of Mr. Wilkinson the Wire dancer for use of the Assembly Room	16- 0
	To Mr. Shreeve for teaching the boys to sing (These payments were steadily increased.)	1- 1- 0
1792	Received fines for Colouring Cattle	
	Thos. Clements	5- 5- 0
	Wm. Nudds	4- 4- 0
	Wm. Gooda	2- 2- 0
	Salary of Wm. Cadmore, Town Crier, increased to 10 shilling per annum. This was additional to each separate Crying.	
1793	Received from Mr. Lalliet the dancing master for use of the Assembly Room	2- 2- 0
	Paid the Music Band at the Election	12- 6
1794	Wm. Barmby appointed organ-blower at a salary of £20 per annum.	
	Special Contribution to the Poor	25- 0- 0
1795	Paid the Mole-catcher's Widow	1- 1- 0
1796	To Robert Davey for painting the arms of the Leman family on woodwork to be put on the north gable of the Free School	8-11- 0
	To Messrs. Rede and Smith soliciting the Paving Act	333- 0- 0
1797	Cash paid to Bank of England as the Corporation's contribution to the Defence of the Country	210- 0- 0
1798	Paid towards the cost of a Fire Engine	40- 0- 0
	To the Singing Boys (i.e. the Choir)	5- 5- 0
1799	To Mr. Corby for a Map and Survey of the Common	£21- 0- 0
	To the Surgeons for inoculating the Poor	30- 0- 0

1801	Received from rent of New Inclosures on Goose Green	330-15- 0
1802	For Fireworks at the Peace rejoicing	7- 9- 8
	Paid towards a new Fire Engine	60- 0- 0
1804	To Jas. Cole for use of the Volunteers	100- 0- 0
1805	Paid to Gun Firers	10- 6
	For Music at the Feast	2- 3- 0
	For Fireworks at Lord Nelson's Victory at Trafalgar	5- 5- 0
1806	The Assembly Room leased for a period not exceeding six weeks in each year to William Scraggs and David Fisher at £15 per annum. (This was £6 less than had formerly been paid.)	
1807	For a silver teapot and stand from the Corporation to Rev. Wm. Spurdens for translating the Charter of Beccles Fen	15-15- 0
	Mr. Burrows' Bill for Books for scholars of the Free School	6- 6- 0
	(This was the first of such payments, which were not regular.)	
1809	Subscription to the Poor on Jubilee Day	50- 0- 0
	To the Surgeons for Vaccinating the Poor	38-15- 0
	Loss by forged bank note	1- 0- 0
1810	Ten guineas to be paid annually to Robt. Harmer for keeping the Fire Engine, Harness Collars, Leather Pipes and Buckets in good order.	
1811	John Weeds the younger appointed scavanger of the Town at six shillings a week.	
1812	Corporation allow the Protestant Dissenters (Congregationalists) to use the Assembly Room for services until their Chapel is completed.	
1815	John Ward dismissed from the Corporation "by reason of his improper conduct as a bankrupt"	
	New contract with Scavanger, who is to receive a salary of four guineas per annum and to dispose of "all muck and compost" for his own benefit.	
1816	No feast, owing to "the low state of the Funds of this Corporation.	

This last entry would have seemed shocking, almost incredible, to previous generations of Corporation members. There had always been two annual entertainments: The Feast on Audit Day and the Dinner on Election Day. On these local occasions the bells rang loud and long and members of the Corporation sported their ceremonial robes. Allowances were made to the Portreeve towards the cost of the festivals. As the cost of food rose in the 1790's these allowances were increased:

	Audit Day	Election Day
1791	from £12 to £15	from £5 to £7
1793	to £20	
1797	to £35	to £12
1799		to £15
1802	to £50	to £20

In 1815 there was a rumpus. The allowances were cancelled. It was ordered that in future the Corporation should bear all expenses, the entertainments "henceforth to be considered as the Feasts of the Corporation; and that the Portreeve be not permitted to give any Invitations thereto without the consent of the Corporation or majority of a Committee appointed for this purpose". At the meeting when the order was made, John Lee Farr, Portreeve, tendered his resignation from the Corporation, and the resignation was accepted.

John Farr had recently undertaken the considerable work of co-ordinating arrangements for the Festival celebrating the Peace in 1814. The Farrs, wealthy brewers, had long been prominent in the town. Thomas Farr, John's uncle, had been a member of the 12 for many years and twice Portreeve. What happened? Had John Farr packed the Dinner with his own friends? Had he perhaps slighted some members of the Corporation? Somehow he had offended the susceptibilities of his colleagues; he had affronted the dignity of the Corporation. The touchiness of elected dignitaries shown in this little episode seems an enduring feature of local affairs. When in the succeeding year, the Corporation had no funds to provide a dinner, John Farr had some balm for his own wounded pride.

CHAPTER VII.

The Importance of Inns

"William Hindes, eighteen years servant to Mr. John Spackman of the White Horse Tavern in Ipswich —

Begs Leave to inform the Public that he has entered upon the King's Head at Beccles in Suffolk, and hath laid in an entire fresh stock of neat Old Wines of all Sorts, brandy, Rum etc. He humbly hopes that all Gentlemen and others who were customers of the said House will continue their Favours; and begs to assure those who shall please to make Trial, that all possible Endeavours shall be used to accommodate them in the neatest, best and genteelist Manner, by their Obedient humble Servant to command William Hindes."

Thus the landlord of the town's largest inn announced in the newspaper his arrival in 1761, and during the thirty years of his reign the King's Head gained supremacy over its principal rival, the White Lion.

There was a great difference between inns like these, and the lesser establishments which sold ale. Eighteenth century inns were both numerous and varied. Some were good; some were very bad. Some was respectable; some were decidedly not. Crabbe's "Borough" has a chapter about Inns, where these two contrasts are clearly shown, from the "Lion" —

"To him the noblest guest the town detains
Flies for repast, and in his court remains."

to the dubious "Bear", where "nieces" of the landlady succeed one another with mysterious rapidity —

"Causeless they go, and seldom more appear."

So too in Goldsmith's "She Stoops to Conquer" there is Mr. Hardcastle's country mansion which young Marlow and his friend can easily mistake for a large comfortable inn catering for travellers, and the village alehouse, "The Three Jolly Pigeons", where Tony Lumpkin and his cronies swill their ale and bawl their coarse songs.

Eighteenth century literature is full of Inns. To the novelist they afford endless opportunities for incident and the introduction of new characters; and every diarist and literary traveller (a numerous band, especially in the second half of the century) has recorded his impressions of inns good and, more often, of inns bad.

The discomforts of inferior inns were a stock subject for literary sarcasm in a time of increasing refinement. Thus Mr. Ralph Rusty reports to his friend John C. Esquire in "Modern Manners" (1782).

"Vile liquors to swallow, damp beds to repose on;
One night I remember I slept with my cloaths on;
Rooms strong with tobacco, tough meat and blunt knives,
Impertinent hosts and their nimble-tongued wives —
We were worried and teaz'd almost out of our lives!"

But inns were essential to the traveller. Even after 1784 when the Mail Coaches shortened the time of long journeys and, since they travelled at night, reduced the custom of many inns, travellers still brought much grist to the innkeeper's mill. We often read of travellers finding more than one inn full and of anxious searching for alternative accommodation.

If the humble alehouses did little business in catering for travellers, they could do a plentiful trade in drink. Eighteenth century drinking was astonishing. One evening in February, 1775, eleven Fenmen from the Isle of Ely came into the Hooks inn at Saffron Walden; and, after a preliminary wetting of the whistle, made a wager with the barmaid. She was to draw beer in single half-pints and carry each from the cellar to them. If she was exhausted by this work before they were unable to drink any more, she would pay for the liquor; if not, they would pay for it. She won — after drawing 517 single half-pints. She had walked about twelve miles; and they had drunk an average of 22½ pints each!

Inns provided other diversions besides drinking. Cock-fighting, so popular in the eighteenth century, took place at inns. There was generally cock-fighting during the annual races at towns large and small in East Anglia; and quite often at other times too, when a match could be arranged between teams of local gentry. Inns had long served as temporary theatres; and, though permanent theatres were to supplant them in most towns regularly visited by the travelling companies, they could still serve this need throughout the century. Thus in 1774 a company then playing at Holt, announced "the fitting up of a commodious Theatre at the Bear, North Walsham." They proposed to open a season of three weeks with Cumberland's popular play, "The West Indian", and "humbly hope for the Immediate Encouragement of Nobility, Gentry and others".

Some of the larger inns had bowling-greens; there was one at Beccles. But the inn catered principally for indoor amusements and social functions. Before the building of Assembly Rooms in the Market Towns, the Subscription Assemblies which took place monthly or bi-monthly, were held at the principal Inns. Until the Assembly Room was built at Beccles in 1785, the Subscription Assemblies were held at the White Lion. Such gatherings were the principal public social occasions of small town society; and though now subscribers might be admitted, charges indicate a desire for exclusiveness. Thus in 1774 — "Bungay First Subscription Assembly (at the New Room at the Tuns) will be on Wednesday 27th April. Non-subscribers three shillings." The usual charge for the best seats in rural theatres at this time was 2/6.

Besides the Assemblies, there were dances and concerts at inns. Fakenham Musical Society held monthly concerts at the Red Lion. Dereham subscription concerts, followed by a Ball in the evening, took place at the George. There were concerts at the Three Tuns in Bungay. Thus the large inn provided the accommodation for social gatherings with their cards and conversation, for concerts and for dances. Moreover, the inn was the invariable headquarters for the various Clubs of market towns. Book clubs were formed in many towns during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Thomas Miller, the noted book-seller and antiquarian, was a prominent member of the Bungay Club, established in 1770. It met at the King's Head. The names of these societies are frequently found in the list of subscribers generally prefixed in eighteenth century books. Thus in Rev. William Clubbe's "The Omnium" (1798) are the names of Beccles, Bocking, Claydon, Coddenham and Sudbury Book Clubs. Isaac Blowers recorded his occasional attendance at the Book Club meetings at Beccles King's Head. According to Crabbe, the intellectual fare was the least important of the pleasures of such meetings —

> "On such occasions minds with one consent
> Are to the comforts of the body lent:
> There was no pause — the wine went swiftly round
> Till struggling Fancy was by Bacchus bound."

It would evidently be an exaggeration, then, to claim that the inn was

a centre of intellectual life in the market town; on the other hand, these clubs were frequented by the country clergy, a remarkably varied set amongst whom there was a fair proportion of scholarly men.

The inn provided the means whereby the first attempts were made for provision against sickness and for decent burial. Shoberl in his "Topographical Description of Suffolk" (1810) says there were 219 clubs with 7709 members in the county. At least four such Benefit or Box Clubs existed in Beccles, associated with the White Swan, the Hermitage, the Angel and the Red Lion. Isaac Blowers had shown benevolent interest in these Clubs and they were all represented in the solemn torch-light procession at his funeral.

Many and varied were the tradesmen, teachers, and others who used Inns for their business. Mr. Browne, the Norwich dancing-master ("pupil of the celebrated M. Noverre"), used local inns as a venue when he came to various towns in Norfolk and north Suffolk. His instruction was not confined to dancing: "He also teaches Gentlemen the use of the Small Sword". Itinerant hair-dressers found inns a convenient place of business, particularly in the 1770's when ladies' hair-styles reached a high pitch of absurdity.

"To the Ladies

W. Colward, Hair-dresser from Bath, to be heard of at the following places viz: Mr. White's at the Half-Moon in the Market Place Norwich, to dress for the Guild; at the George Inn at Dereham, to dress for the Assembly there the 22nd; at Alderman Weales' at Cambridge to dress for the Oratorios; and at the Black Horse, Tankard St., Ipswich, during the Race Week. Those Ladies that please to honour him with their Commands, by timely notice, will be punctually waited on.

N.B. He will attend at the above Places two or three Days before the entertainment at each Place begins, to receive the Ladies Commands.

He has brought with him a great Variety of Hair Tokes, Bows etc. and great Variety of various foreign Pomatums".

Other arts very different from those of Messrs. Browne and Colward were practised at Inns.

"Richard Balls has a method of taking Rats alive without using any Poison and undertakes to clear any House, Barn or other building of these destructive Vermin. He produced very lately in Bungay Market a great Number of Rats alive to the great Diversion of many Spectators.

He is to be heard of at the Bear and Bells in Beccles every Week . . . "

The ample stabling at large Inns was convenient for horse-breeding. A large inn might have stabling for a hundred horses. Such an inn was an important provider of employment in market towns. Annual advertisements in the spring under the heading "To Cover this Season" show that Inns in all the market towns were used by itinerant breeders. Thus: "April 16, 1763, Forrester will cover the season at the House (i.e. Inn) of James Collins at Beccles at 11

shillings and 6 pence each Mare . . . the above Horse is allowed, by all Gentlemen that are Judges of a Horse to be the most proper to expect Size and Strength from". Forrester was to be at Halesworth on Tuesdays, Harleston on Wednesdays and Bungay on Thursdays. He led a busy life.

Meetings of all kinds took place at inns. The various Societies of propertied men for combating crime held their annual meetings there. Several societies for prosecuting felons and horse thieves were formed in Norfolk and Suffolk during the latter part of the eighteenth century — a time of increasing distress among the poor and consequently of much petty theft and poaching, as well as of more serious crimes. The parish overseers of the poor met at one of the larger inns, meetings concerned with the establishment and running of the Houses of Industry, meetings concerned with enclosures —such as the initial announcement of intention, the apportioning of land and hearing of complaints by the legally appointed Commissioners, the proposals for new roads and so on — all these were held at inns.

Was there to be a sale of household good, or of books? — Catalogues were to be obtained at an Inn. Or was there a company of Players visiting the town? — Tickets were to be had at a principal Inn. Or was there local recruiting? — An Inn was sure to be the chosen place —

"All Gentlemen Volunteers, who are free and able and willing to serve his Majesty King George in his Majesty's fourth Regiment of Dragoons, commanded by Lieutenant General Carpenter, . . . whose Inclinations are above Slavery, and whose hearts beat high at the Sound of a Trumpet, let them repair to Sergeant Fell of the said Regiment, at the sign of the Valiant Dragon, or the Trumpet, in St. Stephens, Norwich etc. – they shall have Horse, Arms and Accoutrements to the Value of 50 pounds . . . " to which Sergeant Fell would add the persuasive powers of the bottle. That such was the custom a further example indicates. Gentlemen Volunteers for the 54th Regiment of Foot – "let them repair to the King's Head at Brooke, to Sergeant Smith at Seething, to Sergeant Hawkes at the sign of the Bear in Fishers' Lane, St Giles, or to Sergeant Arnold in Pocklethorpe, where they will be kindly entertained, and for further Encouragement each man shall receive one Guinea in advance and a Crown to drink his Majesty's health . . . "

The use of inns of lesser repute as depots or rendezvous for smugglers and highwaymen is outside the scope of this chapter (Leonard Thompson has some examples in his "Old Norwich Inns"), which is principally concerned to show the great importance of the larger and reputable inns of this period — for trade as well as for travel, for business as well as for amusement. And so, when a large inn changed hands, it was customary to "inform the Public" by means of an advertisement. As William Hindes, in taking over the King's Head in Beccles in 1761 had done this in the advertisement quoted at the beginning of the chapter, so did James Alger, in taking the White Lion in 1774 —

"The Publick are requested to take Notice that the White Lion

in Beccles, now in the occupation of James Beck, is now taken by James Alger, from Diss, where he will continue till Lady-day next, at which Time he will open a large and commodious Inn, situate near the Town-hall in Beccles aforesaid (to which House the above Sign will at that time be removed) and of which public notice will then be given. In the meantime he begs Leave to solicit the Continuance of the former Customers of the White Lion, together with the additional Favours of Gentlemen, Travellers and others, where they will meet with neat Wines and spiritous Liquors, and will greatly oblige.

Their most obedient humble Servant
James Alger.

N.B. To be sold cheap at the above Place, a very neat Billiard Table, almost new".

Perhaps Alger bought a Billiard Table with him; for this was one of the many amenities the good inn was expected to provide.

Whilst Alger's predecessor, James Beck, was landlord, the "White Lion" had sometimes been the venue for cock-fighting. Two other Beccles inns, the "Falcon" and the "Angel" were also associated with this popular and brutal sport.

Besides all these uses of the inn, for pleasure and entertainment, for social life, business, and the management of local affairs, there was another occasional use: the distribution of charity. Winter was the season of hardship for the poor. Cold and hunger were suffered by many families. At such times there was desperate need for charity; and, though such charity could hardly meet so widespread a need, there is much evidence that special assistance to the poor during the depths of the winter was customary. In the hard winter of 1784, collections for the poor, and distributions of food and coal, were made in many parishes of Norfolk and Suffolk. Local magistrates were often prominent in this work. Philip Bedingfield of Ditchingham arranged a distribution of meal to the poor at half the usual price; in Bungay there was "a handsome collection". At Beccles, the local effort was rather different. "Several liberal subscriptions have been entered into by the inhabitants of Beccles, in order to render the situation of (that worthy part of the community) the industrious poor, comfortable in this inclement season. Three times a week a dinner has been provided at the White Lion, consisting of the best beef and bread, and served out to the relief of 750 persons at a time". This example shows the extent of need in a town with a population of under 3,000. Equally, it shows the extent of local charitable endeavour — and the usefulness to that endeavour of a large inn.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Scourge of the Smallpox

"O if to dance all night and dress all day,
Charm'd the small-pox, or chased old age away,
Who would not scorn what housewife's cares produce,
Or who would learn one earthly thing of use?"

Pope's well-known lines in "The Rape of the Lock" (1714) suggest how dreaded a disease was smallpox in the eighteenth century. It was destructive of beauty and still more destructive of lives, especially of children's lives. It was estimated to have carried off a thirteenth of each generation until, at the close of the century, Jenner discovered vaccination.

Its presence sometimes led to the cancellation of Fairs, those great occasions of rural trade and pleasure in the eighteenth century. Thus in the Ipswich Journal the following notice appeared in Feb. 1759 — "There will be no fair kept in Bildeston this year on Ash-Wednesday as usual, on account of the Small-Pox being in several adjacent Parishes". Similar notices appeared in March and April of the cancellation of Fairs at Boxford and Bures St. Mary, for the same reason.

The ravages of smallpox had indeed been lessened by inoculation, introduced from Turkey by the woman traveller, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, early in the century. There remained, however, a considerable risk. Sometimes, instead of the expected mild form of the disease, a severe illness occurred; and occasionally the attack proved fatal. But in the sixties Sutton introduced a method of arm-to-arm inoculation, and this considerably reduced the incidence of severe attacks.

There was scepticism among leading practitioners about the effectiveness of Sutton's treatment; but its popularity was great and its financial success astonishing. Sutton, whose father was a Suffolk doctor, began his practice as an inoculator at Ingatestone, Essex, in 1763. In 1764 he netted 2,000 guineas and in the following year £6,300. From 1764-66 he inoculated 13,792 persons, and his assistants 6,000 more, without a single death.

The domestic life of one of the most notable Becclesians of the later eighteenth century was tragically affected by smallpox. Isaac Blowers' young wife died of "the fatal smallpox" in 1755. They had been married only three years. She was twenty-two.

Blowers' signature as one of "the principal inhabitants of Beccles" appears on a significant letter in "The Ipswich Journal" of 1764, which announced that Beccles was completely free from small-pox. (The town had suffered severely during the previous two years.)

This letter shows the effect which an outbreak of smallpox could have on trade and travel. Small-pox was notoriously contagious; a town where it was known to be present was a town to be avoided. It had even discouraged visits to London, though inoculation had, according to these verses of 1769, decreased the countryman's fears of metropolitan contagion.

"The Country Cousins"

"Since Sutton's o'ercome the small-pox,
Rustics ramble over the nation;
I wish he had been in the Stocks,
Both him and his Inoculation:
'Tis horrid to have so much kin;
Yet our Country Cousins, poor souls,
Would be welcome to come now and then
Would they bring but their pigs, ducks and fowls".

The popularity of inoculation led doctors to take houses which were specially appointed for the reception of those who wished to be inoculated. A Beccles surgeon had one such house. An advertisement in the "Norwich Gazette" (1763) announced:

"As Mr. Chambers, Surgeon at Beccles, hath been greatly importuned to inoculate the Small-pox, he hath now, for the Conveniency of the Town and Neighbourhood, opened a House for Inoculation at Whitacre .... Five Guineas each .... Ten admitted at a Time".

This was private enterprise. But sometimes the town authorities might take a hand. Thus in Southwold the workhouse which had been erected in 1738 was pulled down in 1774 and in its place was built "a house for the reception of persons suffering from small-pox".

The dread of small-pox sometimes led to extreme selfishness by residents of one parish against another. There was in Suffolk in 1763 a case of four persons removing a man from their own parish to another. They were fined five shillings each. It may be that this surreptitious removal was becoming a practice, and that the Magistrates decided that only severe punishments would curb it, for when in the following year a similar case was tried at Beccles Quarter Sessions, much heavier penalties were imposed. William Benfield, James Wigg and James Todd were convicted of removing a poor man with small-pox from Carlton Colville to Wrentham. Benfield — presumably a man of substance — was fined £30; Todd and Wigg were fined 13/4 each. All three were committed until the fines should be paid; Todd and Wigg were sentenced to one month in prison.

The prevalence of small-pox might be used as a plea — or perhaps a deterrent — against the billeting of soldiers, as this letter shows:

Beccles Post Office,
17th June, 1764.

Honoured Sir,

Last night we were informed as a certainty that a Company of Invalids, now lying at Yarmouth, were to march in here on Monday

next, on account of the Norfolk Militia marching in there the same day for their annual exercise, and Field Marshall Sir Robert Rich, Bart. being at his seat in this place, we waited upon him this morning, who was then setting out for London, or would have wrote to you himself, but desired me to assure you he should take as a favour that you will, immediately upon receipt of this, order them to some other place during our races which begin on Wednesday next. Bungay or Lowestoft are much more than sufficient to cover them, the first place being but six miles from this, the other ten, and but seven miles from Yarmouth. We have already a party of General Moystin's Dragoons, and have for almost two years been afflicted with the small-pox, that if Your Honour would not order them here any more it would be an additional favour to Sir Robert Rich thankfully acknowledged by the inhabitants and by, honoured sir, your most obedient humble servant

Isaac Blowers, post master".

An interesting example of help by one town for another is seen in this entry in the Bungay Churchwardens' Book for 1737-38 quoted by Ethel Mann in "Old Bungay" —

"Pd. a messenger going to advertise the town clear of Small pox 5/-

Memo. In this year our town was greatly visited with Small pox which induced the gentlemen of the town of Harleston to raise by subscription the sum of thirty-five pounds, five shilling, towards the relief and support of such distressed families in our two parishes as had shared in the affliction. A list of such persons was sent to Harleston and approved of by the aforesaid gentlemen and the monies were distributed as under mentioned".

The people of Harleston with Redenhall perhaps remembered that, when they had suffered a terrible visitation of small-pox in 1712-13, other parishes in Norfolk and Suffolk contributed over £148 in relief. The largest contribution from a single parish was £19.2.3 from Beccles.

In Beccles, the initiative for relief for small-pox sufferers came from the Vestry meetings. Thus at a Vestry meeting in Church on Nov. 16 1755 "It was ordered that the Overseers do disburse what money they shall think necessary towards the relief of persons afflicted with the small-pox". In 1787 a much more thorough plan was adopted: "It was unanimously agreed that it is the opinion of this meeting that the Small-pox is highly injurious to the trade of this town. Agreed unanimously that the Surgeons of this town be requested to put a stop to inoculation in this place on the 17th instant". (This was a fortnight after the day of the Meeting.) "Whereas one of the Surgeons (viz. Mr. Tyrell Carter) has not been able to attend this Meeting it is requested that Rev. Bence Sparrow and the Churchwardens of the Parish do wait upon Mr. Carter and acquaint him with the above request. Whereas it is reputed that several persons are intended to be brought into this Parish from the neighbouring towns and villages for the purpose of being inoculated it is therefore resolved that it will be highly improper and injurious to admit such

Patients after the 17th instant. Agreed that an indictment be preferred against any Householder or Lodger who shall after the 17th instant take in any person not belonging to this town to be nursed for the smallpox and that the expense of such Indictment or Indictments shall be paid out of the Parish Rates".

Several things may be deduced from this unusually long resolution. The strong sense of any emergency and the determination to meet it is the most obvious. The second point is that the Meeting was not opposed to inoculation, but to the practice of bringing in people from outside the town either to be inoculated or to be treated. The concern of the Meeting was simple: to protect the interest of the Town by reducing to a mimum the risk of spreading the disease. This common interest conflicted with the interest of individuals who stood to gain by providing lodgings — probably at a high price — and of surgeons who would lose fees. It may be that the absence from the meeting of Mr. Carter was not fortuitous. It is significant that the Rector himself was requested "to wait upon him". The Rector was a man of wealth and rank, brother of the Lord of the Manor. The authority of such a man in eighteenth century England was enormous; and here it was reinforced by the clearly expressed wishes of the principal inhabitants. The surgeons, Mr. Carter included, all agreed to toe the line as the records of another Vestry meeting, held only two days later, show: "Answers from the surgeons relative to their stopping inoculation received. The thanks of the town were unanimously voted to them for their ready Complyance with the wishes of the town which are to be conveyed by the Minister and Churchwardens".

The measures taken did not prevent a further outbreak of the scourge in June of the same year. "In consequence of Small-pox breaking out in the Town Mr. John Assey surgeon voluntarily inoculated (gratis) near 350 poor persons: for the relief of which the gentlemen and tradesmen of the Parish subscribed the sum of £28.13.0 which was distributed by the Churchwardens".

Five years later the scourge returned. Now at last the financial help of the Corporation and the Feoffees was requested. "In order to get rid of the said Distemper as soon as may be it is considered that a general inoculation should take place and that all such poor persons as are not able to bear the expense of it shall be assisted therein and several members of the Corporation of Beccles Fen and some of the Feoffees of the lands belonging to the Town being present it is agreed that application shall be made to each of the Bodies to bear the said expense between them in equal proportions and that such persons as are included in a list now produced by Mr. Chaston, one of the said Churchwardens, amounting in number to 220 shall or may be inoculated and provided with the necessary medicines and attendances at the expense of the said Bodies if they shall thereunto assent Provided the surgeons in the Town or any of them will undertake to do it at 2s. 6d. per Head".

The Feoffees Book has this entry showing compliance with the Vestry Meeting's request:

"Paid to Messrs. Assey, Crowfoot, Purvis, Harber and Sayers towards the charge for Inoculating the poor with the small-pox £15.10.0".

If the fee of 2/6 per head was paid, it would appear that more than the listed 220 were inoculated. The prejudice against inoculation had evidently disappeared. In "The Suffolk Baptists" a case is mentioned of a Wattisham woman who was separated "for the sin of inoculation". Two other cases were brought before the local Baptist church in 1796, but these persons "having some sense of their sin, it was agreed that they should fill up their places". After this, apparently, no further notice was taken of the matter.

Six years elapsed. In 1799 small-pox returned. A Vestry Meeting resolved on the same measures as in 1793 and the provision of 1787, whereby no further inoculations were to take place after a stated day, was repeated, with the same motive. "Agreed that an Indictment shall be preferred against any householder or lodger who shall after the 16th instant take in any person not belonging to this town to be nursed for the small-pox".

At this outbreak the Feoffees contributed £20 towards inoculation costs.

But better relief was now available. Edward Jenner had for several years been conducting his experiment in vaccination. The belief that milkmaids rarely got small-pox because they had been infected by cowpox from the udder of the cow led him to his discovery. In 1796 he transferred matter from a cowpox vesicle on the finger of Sarah Nelmes to the arm of an eight-year-old boy, James Phipps. Six weeks later he inoculated this boy with small-pox. It did not take. After further experiments, he published in 1798 "An Inquiry into the Causes and Effects of the Variolae Vaccinae". Despite opposition, his remedy was soon widely known and practised. Parliament voted him £10,000 in 1802 and a further £20,000 in 1806. His fame spread to America and to France, where such was his reputation that a safe-conduct signed by him could take an English traveller through the country in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars. The Suffolk poet, Bloomfield, celebrated Jenner's discovery in one of his best poems, "Good Tidings; or News from the Farm". Bloomfield describes how his mother went to help a poor woman who had small-pox. She herself contracted the disease. She survived, but her husband died; and she was left with six children, of whom the future poet was still a babe in arms. Years later, small-pox claimed three of his brother's children. No wonder Bloomfield wrote on this subject with passionate urgency. No wonder he wanted to use his influence — "The Farmer's Boy" had given him temporary fame — in propagating Jenner's discovery:

> "Momentous triumph — fiend! thy reign is o'er;
> Thou, whose blind rage hath ravag'd ev'ry shore,
> Whose name denotes destruction, whose foul breath,
> For ever hovering round the dart of death,
> Fells, mercilessly fells, the brave and base,
> Through all the kindreds of the human race!"

When a further outbreak occurred in Beccles in 1805, the old method was discarded in favour of Jenner's. "It was resolved that it will be more for the benefit and advantage of the Town and the Country in general that the Inoculation by the Cowpox should be encouraged as much as possible and that Inoculation by the small-pox be discontinued . . . and it is ordered that the Overseers do forthwith collect an account of the several persons in the Town who have not been inoculated, distinguishing the Paupers from others and such as are willing to be inoculated with the Cowpox". The surgeons concurred.

A few years later there was a mass vaccination of the poor in Norwich. 1,316 persons were treated: not a life was lost. Jenner had fully deserved the national gratitude. The disease which Bloomfield had called "the Scourge of the world" seemed mastered.

But Bloomfield's optimism was premature. There were further epidemics in the early nineteenth century. A particularly virulent one reached Norwich in April 1819. Of the 530 deaths, over 300 occurred in the months of June and July. Nearly half the deaths were of children under three. It was remarked that the epidemic was "confined almost exclusively to the very lowest orders of the people".

CHAPTER IX.

The Church

The period from about 1770 to 1820 was an age of epitaphs. Mural monuments of this period abound in English churches; the walls of Bath Abbey are covered with them. Some of the best poems of the period are, or contain, epitaphs. Gray thought it proper to conclude the great Elegy with an epitaph; Johnson's finest short poem is "On the Death of Dr. Robert Levett"; and Cowper's blend of humour and melancholy is found at its best in his "Epitaph on a Hare". One of the most notable writers of epitaphs was Dr. Samuel Parr, parson, scholar and sometime Headmaster of Norwich Grammar School. Parr read 2,000 inscriptions before even beginning his epitaph on Dr. Johnson. In all he composed over one hundred epitaphs.

The strong feeling at this time about the importance of providing a dignified and durable monument is illustrated in the following letter from William Boycatt to Martin Routh. The two men, now growing old, had been friends from boyhood. Martin's father had died in 1802 and his mother in 1810; they were buried at St. Margaret's,

South Elmham, which William Boycatt had visited a couple of years later, evidently at Martin's request, to inspect the graves and the monument whose inscription Martin had composed:

"I am just returned from St. Margaret's. You know I believe that your late Father and Mother are buried in the churchyard: but from your Inscription, you do not seem to know that the Monument erected to their Memory is *stuck up, abroad,* against the northern wall of the Chancel. It is a shameful cheat in the Person who put it up... it is not even respectable in its appearance and I think would hardly have been respectable if it had been well done: it is a plain slab, of a bad colour, full of flaws and cracks: and it is supported at bottom, not by a stone Base (which it should have been) but by a wooden one only, and that wood of the very worst sort, and even now in the act of rotting: and when it is rotten, I do verily think that the whole slab will tumble down.

Over the grave is laid a very good thick rough stone... If you wish no more than to retain your epitaphs, I think it may be engraved upon the rough stone I have mentioned above. If you wish, besides the epitaph, to have a respectful Monument raised to the Memory of your Parents, I think you must have an entirely new one, and that it must be —

Either a *Tomb* rais'd above the grave and your epitaph upon it exactly as it is

or a *Mural Monument,* within the Chancel, with such slight alteration of the Epitaph as its locality (out of sight of the burying place) may suggest to you to be necessary.

You have wish'd for my opinion, such as it is, you have it: but you must have the goodness to make your own determination. It is grateful to me to have been able to do any thing that you wish'd, to have an opportunity of sending my kind love to Anne and to assure you that I am faithfully and affectionately your friend

Wm. Boycatt".

The tone of this letter and the care for practical detail in the memorial, exemplify the age of epitaphs.

There is a significant difference between the mural monuments in village churches and those in town churches. In the former are monuments to successive generations of a particular local family or to the incumbents of the parish; monuments to doctors or attorneys, schoolmasters, scholars or local dignitaries are rare. In the latter, however, such monuments are not uncommon. There are some twenty mural tablets in Beccles Parish Church; ten of these are of the period 1780-1820 and they include monuments to three doctors, a merchant, a schoolmaster, a draper and a grocer. Five of these had been Portreeves of the town; and the tradesmen, having made sufficient money to retire, were able to adopt the style of "Gent".

Charity to the poor was a virtue frequently commended on these epitaphs. Thus Isaac Blowers was commended for his "pure benevolence". He left £20 to the poor. Details of local wills show how often money was bequeathed to help the local poor. Thomas Page, Rector of Beccles, left "To the poor of the said town of Beccles five

Beccles Church with cupola (removed in 1815)

pounds" (1763). Ann Jolly's will (1782) provided "Five pounds to be paid to the Churchwardens of Beccles to be laid out in bread, ten shillings worth every Monday until that money shall be all expended and to be distributed by the Churchwardens at their direction to the most necessitous poor people belonging to the said parish". Elizabeth Crowfoot, Widow of William Crowfoot, left (1789) "To such poor industrious persons inhabitants of Beccles as Robert Purvis and William Crowfoot my son shall think proper objects of Charity £10 to be distributed within a month". Many more examples could be given.

Yet the weaknesses of the Church at this time, often dwelt upon by historians, can certainly be illustrated in Beccles and its neighbourhood. It was a period of inordinately long incumbencies. The following list includes only appointments made after 1740 and before 1790 to parishes less than ten miles from Beccles —

Kirby Cane	Henry Wilson, Lord Berners	1787-1851	64 years
Geldeston	John Fayerman	1754-1816	62 „
Ellingham	Roger Hall	1785-1843	58 „
Shadingfield	J. Sharpe	1752-1805	53 „
Brampton	Nunn Prettyman	1742-1793	51 „
Broome	W. Manning	1760-1810	50 „
Ellough	R. Leman	1749-1799	50 „
Ditchingham	W. Massey	1752-1802	50 „
Hedenham	Peter Forster	1762-1812	50 „
Woodton	Thos. Holmes	1782-1832	50 „

In Beccles itself, Bence Sparrow held the living from 1774 until his death in 1824; and there were at least half a dozen other incumbencies of over 45 years.

These figures, however, are in one way misleading. The incumbent did not necessarily do the work of the parish. If he was a wealthy man, or if he held another living, he might arrange for a curate. The wealthy Rector of Beccles, Bence Bence, always had the assistance of a curate. At Weston, where Robert Hughes held the living for forty-six years, Peter Routh, James Safford, John Penn, Samuel Routh (son of Peter) and H. Taylor were successively curates. Complications were numerous. Thus John Penn was curate at Beccles and at Weston and was also vicar of Roughton in Norfolk. Peter Routh held the livings of St. Peter and St. Margaret South Elmham and of Wicklewood (in Norfolk) from 1753 to 1802; he was rector of Beccles and of Redisham from 1764 to 1774; and he was curate of Weston from 1770 to 1783 and again from 1784 to 1786.

Many of the clergy held one living and acted as curates in other parishes. Pluralities were numerous. Christopher Smear held the livings of Reydon (1727-58) and of Mutford (1730-81) and was also curate of South Cove. Valentine Lumley held the livings at Stockton (1758-95) and of Ilketshall St. Laurence and St. Margaret (1754-94), James Safford held the livings of Mettingham (1758-1805) and Redisham (1786-1805) as well as being curate at Weston for a brief period. It seems that the sharp distinction between wealthy incum-

bents and needy curates is a gross over-simplification of a complicated situation.

That a good many livings were family preserves the following table shows:

Parish	*Incumbent*	*From Year*	*Patron*
Beccles	Bence Sparrow (later Bence Bence)	1774	Robert Sparrow
Flixton	William Adair	1754	William Adair
St. George, S. Elmham	William Adair	1767	William Adair
Pakefield	Robert Leman	1766	William Leman
Somerleyton	John Love		Mary Love
Ilketshall, St. Lawrence	V. Lumley	1754	V. Lumley
Ringsfield	Gunton Postle	1790	Samuel Postle
Fritton	Charles Buckle	1788	Catherine Buckle
Benacre	J. Gooch	1776	Sir T. Gooch

If there were added to this incomplete list, examples of livings granted to relations by marriage, it would probably be found that more than half the livings were either in the family or granted to family connections. The eldest daughter of Rev. Bence Bence, was married to Rev. L. R. Brown in 1809 and in 1810 Brown was given the living of Kelsale and Carlton on the presentation of his father-in-law.

Moreover, one man often exercised extensive patronage — one of the principal sources of the power and influence of the landed gentry. The Gooch and Adair and Bedingfield families enjoyed such patronage in the neighbourhood of Beccles and Bungay. Robert Sparrow was patron of six livings.

Eighteenth century satirists found a congenial subject in the vices and laxity of clergymen. The bishops did not escape. Charles Churchill (himself a deplorable clergyman, though a notable poet) reserved some of his keenest shafts for Bishop Warburton. Smollett depicts a precious pair, a vicar and his curate, whom Roderick Random encounters at an inn — the latter, subservient in the vicar's presence, abuses him heartily on his departure. And when the curate in his turn leaves the inn after obliging the company with some bawdy songs we hear that he supplemented his meagre twenty pounds per annum by cheating at cards.

Needy curates continued to provide comic matter for writers at the end of the century. In George Colman's "Broad Grins" (1802) is "Two Parsons; or The Tale of a Shirt" in which the principal character is Ozias Polygot, "the lazy, fat incumbent's Hack," a curate with only £27 per annum. His wife had produced three sets of twins in three years. He has only one shirt; and when an unexpected invitation is received for him to dine at the Squire's, that shirt is in the wash' The resourceful wife cuts off part of his surplice to make a very large cravat — so large as to cover up the absence of a shirt. Off goes Ozias, unaware that he has only been asked to dinner to provide a butt for the wit of the Squire's cynical London guests.

The simple curate is amazed by the luxury of the furniture and ornaments and shocked by the statues, reflecting —

"And if that naked nymph who looks so smugly
Be beauty's type, then it must be confessed
That Mrs. Polygot, when quite undressed,
Is most astonishingly ugly!"

During dinner the company make jokes at his expense, and also at the expense of another guest, Rev. Obadiah Pringle, who was "chaplain to a lord, and toady of my lord's kept lady". A thunderstorm comes on; Ozias cannot go home. He and Pringle are accommodated in one bed in an attic. In the morning Ozias puts on Pringle's shirt (he had persuaded the latter to remove it when he got into bed). Pringle accuses him of theft — but the shirt has the initials "O.P." on it, and the ladies say they are sure Ozias had worn a shirt at dinner. He goes home, is able to don his own shirt, and returns Pringle's anonymously.

But rural curates sometimes had due praise as the men who for a pittance attended to the needs of a parish while the incumbent lived elsewhere. James Bird of Yoxford praises the curate of his boyhood days, an eloquent preacher and constant visitor of the poor, whereas

"Our Rector dwelt far off, and only came
Once in the year, to flatter, or to blame,
Shook hands with farmers — smiled upon the wives,
His annual Easter Offering through their lives,
Bowed to their daughters — kissed their children blithe,
Wished them 'good bye' — and vanished with his tithe!"

Crabbe describes the Vicar of his Borough as equally inoffensive and ineffectual; but the Curate, though miserably poor, is a man of true worth and solid learning. The poet himself began his ministerial life as curate at Aldburgh; and after a period first as Chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle and then as Rector of Muston, he returned to Suffolk, leaving a curate in charge at Muston. He was by this time a man of considerable literary reputation and the friend of Burke and Fox. Whilst living at Parham, he acted as curate at Sweffling and Great Glenham.

The curates of Beccles were much more like Crabbe than they were like Colman's comic figure. Peter Routh, after holding the living for a decade, acted as curate for another decade for the wealthy Bence Sparrow. He was followed by Wm. Penn, who became Vicar of Roughton in Norfolk but continued to live in Beccles. Penn's successor, Rev. Spurdens, translated the Charter of Beccles for the Corporation in 1806 and became Headmaster of the Paston School, North Walsham, later. The Rev. William Ainger, whose "Farewell Discourse is mentioned in the chapter on "Schools" in this book, went to St. Bees near Whitehaven as principal of a College. The curates, then, were very unlike the stock literary eighteenth century image of a curate.

Another aspect of Beccles society may conveniently be mentioned here: the number of clergymen resident in the town. The overseers

book listing all rate payers shows, for instance in 1777, the following clergymen: Bence Sparrow, Routh, Lodington, Safford, Frost, Leman and Heptinstall (Independent). Thus there were incumbents of neighbouring villages who preferred to live in the greater comfort and more congenial society of the town.

Repairs and improvements to the Parish Church and the churchyard were frequent, as these points from Vestry meetings show:

1753 "Great complaint having been made to the present and preceding Churchwardens both by the Clergy and People that the present situation of the Reading Desk and Pulpit is such that it is very inconvenient to both, and also that room is greatly wanted for the Inhabitants to sit in to attend Divine Worship .... the present Churchwardens be allowed a Sum not exceeding twenty-five pounds for removing the said Pulpit and Desk and towards building a Gallery."

The project for building a Gallery seems to have been shelved for many years.

1762–63 The eight bells taken down and ten new bells bought and hung. Payment for this expensive undertaking caused much argument and dissension.

1765 Repairs to the Chimes not exceeding twenty pounds.

1766 Frequent complaints about the coldness of the Church — a special committee appointed to expend any sum of money not exceeding Forty Pounds, including a Portal to the Chancel Door."

1768 "That the sum of one pound five shillings be advanced by the Churchwardens in order to purchase a coat for John Sparsham one of the Questmen".

The Questmen were assistants to the Churchwardens. One of their functions was to help to maintain order and decorum in the congregation.

1769 "That a sum not exceeding 30 guineas be expended in setting up afresh the Ten Commandments, the Creed and the Lord's Prayer at the East End of the Church, the same being painted upon a Frontispiece of Wainscot".

1770 A further seven guineas for the repair and maintenance of the Town Clock and Chimes.

1771 The Churchwardens to provide "conveniences for kneeling in the Church, at an expense not exceeding one pound and ten shillings".

1773 "Ordered that the present Churchwardens do immediately procure a Plan and Estimate for a new Pulpit to be erected in Beccles Church, the old one being in a very ruinous condition".

This was done "at an expense not exceeding forty-four pounds".

During this decade (1763-73) considerably sums had been spent on the interior of the Church. The influence of Peter Routh is evident here; but there must have been much support from leading parishioners — who would also be the chief contributors to the church rates.

1778 An enlargment to the churchyard.

1790 New doors were provided for the great Porch.

1791 A gallery was erected at a cost of £74.

1795 A new organ. The opening was a great occasion.

Evidence of increased concern to improve the singing in Church is seen in payments made to the choir. In 1791 the first payment was made (by the Corporation) of a guinea "to Mr. Shreeve for teaching the boys to sing", and in 1796 this duty devolving upon the organist, a payment of six guineas was made. How much of this went to the boys themselves is uncertain, but from 1798 onwards the cost is listed in the Corporation accounts simply as "the singing boys — five guineas", and in 1808 this became "To the singing boys — eight guineas". Meanwhile at a Vestry meeting in 1798 it was ordered that one guinea per year each be allowed to the Men belonging to the choir, not exceeding eight, to be paid by the Churchwardens. Thus the payments to the choir, like most Church expenses, were shared between the Corporation and the Vestry.

In May 1784 the "Norwich Mercury" reported on the Visitations of the Bishop of Norwich to Halesworth and Beccles — "At Halesworth on Monday his Lordship gave a most excellent charge to the Clergy and afterwards confirmed upwards of 1,000 persons. On Tuesday his Lordship attended at Beccles, where a sermon was preached by Rev. M. Routh, after which his Lordship confirmed upwards of 300 persons. On Wednesday at Yarmouth the appearance of clergy was greater than ever known and the Churches crowded with polite congregations . . . . " These remarkable figures may be linked with another movement of the last two decades of the century.

The Sunday School movement was given its national impetus by Robert Raikes; its inception is generally dated from an article in "The Gloucester Journal" in November 1783. The movement received wide support and spread rapidly. The first reference to a Sunday School in Beccles is an entry in Isaac Blower's diary in 1786. The following year there was an Assembly at the King's Head "for the Benefit of the Sunday Schools of this Place". In 1789 the Corporation paid four guineas to the support of the Sunday Schools. At this time Sunday Schools were proliferating in Norfolk and Suffolk, and their establishment was thought worthy of mention in the Norwich and Ipswich papers. In Norwich there were in 1791 twelve such schools, with 618 children under instruction. Gillingwater, the historian of Lowestoft, was a keen supporter; in his pamphlet "An Essay on Parish Workhouses" (1786) he states "four Sunday Schools are established in the town of Harleston whereby upwards of one hundred children in that parish are in a constant and regular course of instruction in the principles of the Christian religion". That instruction was varied with fare more acceptable to the children is shown in the dinner for 93 children of Bungay Sunday School on the occasion of the King's recovery in 1789: "a dinner of plumb pudding, roast and boiled beef, with good ale was provided". And Isaac Blowers recorded in his diary: "Went to the lads Sunday school. Gave each 2d.".

There is little evidence of religious fervour in the Church in Beccles during the years covered by this book. But the records show continuous efforts to maintain the fabric of the church and to improve its interior, an increasing concern for the quality of the services, and a

good deal of benevolence, individual and collective. The Sunday School shows a new concern for children.

The connection of ecclesiastical and civic power in local affairs was very close. On the one hand, the Poor Rate was authorised by Vestry meetings; on the other, the Corporation supported financially every effort to maintain or improve the Parish Church. Moreover, the same men wielded power in the Church and the Corporation. The Churchwardens were always members of the Corporation and nearly always in the senior section of the Corporation, "The Twelve". They were always (with one exception of a surgeon) prominent tradesmen. It is also noteworthy, at a time when the number of clergymen who were Justices of the Peace was increasing rapidly, that Isaac Blowers served as Churchwarden at the same time as he was Chief Constable of the Wangford Hundred; whilst Owen Holmes was Chief Constable during part of his long service as Churchwarden. Holmes was also treasurer of the Beccles Society for Prosecuting Felons. Was it this combination of functions which led a local satirist to speak of "the two faces of Isaac Blowers"?

CHAPTER X

The Dissenters

"Advertisements extraordinary" is the heading of a local squib (anonymous, undated, and written untidely on a scrap of paper) preserved in the Rix Collection. It compares facetiously the variety of religious belief with the variety of lamps in Beccles. The first fifty lamps had been bought in 1771 and the Corporation increased the number to a hundred in 1792. The squib might have been written at either of these times, or perhaps soon after the turn of the century, when gas-lighting was a topic of general interest, since there is reference to gas-burners in it —

"Battle of the Lanterns: or whose shows the best light. 'When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war', will shortly be published, with notes variorum, enriched by the prompter's last stage directions — the right merry and facetious rhyming farce called 'The Battle of the Lanterns', as recently performed at the late theatre royal in Beccles, wherein it is poetically but profitably discussed — what is best adapted to enlighten or light us onwards on a journey undertaken by all, severally indeed, in different directions, but all aiming at the same centrical point: whether it be most advisable to

adopt the Indian's poor but unsophisticated pine-torch, the gorgeous gas-burner of Rome, the steady waxlight of the Church of England (whose perfection it is never to want snuffing), the flaming fish-oil of the sectary, the unobtrusive rush-light of the Quaker or the glow worm glimmer of the Unitarian . . . in conclusion our forthcoming comic bijou labours characteristically to that obvious conclusion, which it not less forcibly than farcically illustrates — viz. that the wrangling so much incomprehensibly about light is the only way to make a plain man, who loves quiet, contented with darkness: or at least to adopt in mixed company, that article of Irish denomination and equivocal utility — a Dark Lantern."

This writer seems to recommend the prudence of keeping one's religious opinions to oneself, and certainly Beccles at this time seems to have been a place where a variety of religious opinion existed, but without acrimonious conflict. Wesley had preached in the town, but referred to it as 'a dull place'. In many East Anglian towns itinerant Methodists met with rough treatment. At Diss in 1770, when the Rev. Thomas Lee attempted to hold a meeting in the Market Place, the clanging of the church bells rendered his words inaudible and he was soon drenched when the local fire-engine was brought into action! At Southwold in 1778, as soon as the first open-air service began, the chief magistrate, Mr. Robinson, ordered the Methodists to desist and on their refusal, the constable marched the preacher to the boundary of the town. When the persistent preacher returned, "Mr. Crisp, who was considered the most active among the attendants, was put in the stocks, from which place he addressed the by-standers on the disgrace attending the persecutors of the preachers of the gospel." But there is no such record of anti-Methodist violence in Beccles. This may have been due to the strength of the Congregationalists (or Independents as they still called themselves) in the town. The Independents had a long and honorable record in Beccles. Though in the middle of the eighteenth century this church had declined to a very small group, there was a revival under Joseph Heptinstall, who came as minister in 1773 and remained until his death in 1802.

Rix gives an account of this interesting man in his 'Brief Records of the Independent Church in Beccles'. "Joseph Heptinstall was born in Walsall in 1742 and was blessed with a pious education, but at the age of only twelve years he manifested the depravity of his nature by avowing himself an atheist. He continued professing himself such a character, till he was led to contemplate a flower in his father's garden, from the beautiful construction of which he was convinced, that it must have derived its existence from a supernatural power. Thus beginning with a flower, he acted the rational part of studying nature more generally and, from its many evident marks of design, was convinced that there must be a first and moving cause, a God that created and animates all things". This account of spiritual precocity may be taken with a pinch of spiritual salt! The Evangelical Magazine, from which Rix extracted these details, loved

to heighten stories of early weaknesses overcome by human striving and supernatural aid.

Heptinstall became a serious young man. He wished to enter the Church of England; his parents approved; and, most conveniently, there was an aunt who possessed the patronage of a living which she promised to her nephew. He commenced a preparatory course of education for the University of Oxford and at the age of seventeen was to have been admitted. But he found himself unable to accept the Articles of the Church. "This distressed him and he became uneasy at the idea of relinquishing his intention to the ministry: for it must be here observed, that, both from education and from family connexions, he was so great a bigot, that nothing could induce him even to enter a dissenting meeting house. While in this unsettled state, he was introduced to the company of an aged gentleman, to whose confidence he was prevailed on to commit the feelings of his mind; and, happily for him, this gentleman was the instrument of removing his prejudice against Dissenters, and the doctrine of election to which he objected." Heptinstall thereupon abandoned the idea of taking Anglican orders, and was admitted to the Independent Academy at Homerton where he studied for seven years. His father, angry at this socially unacceptable course, disinherited him — "and never saw him but once after his removal to Homerton".

The final sentence of this story may be untrue. At any rate, Heptinstall acquired such valuable goods and chattels that even his marriage to the daughter of a properous farmer can hardly account for his possessing them. The sale of his property in 1802 lasted six days — by far the longest sale in Beccles and the neighbourhood during these fifty years. His library contained over 1,400 volumes ("most in a neat state of preservation"). He had excellent and abundant furniture — feather beds and bedding etc. — and an astonishing variety of "Geographical, Astronomical, Mathematical, Mechanical and Musical Instruments, including a pair of good 18in. Globes by Senex, an astronomical clock, solar microscope, Handley's quandrant, mariners' compass, telescopes, harpsichord, violin and flutes". Catalogues were made available at Bungay, Halesworth, Loddon, Wrentham, Lowestoft, Yarmouth and Norwich. He was evidently a man of strong intellectual and cultural interests.

An unusual tribute was paid at his death. The "Norwich Mercury" recorded: "On Sunday last the Rev. Bence Sparrow of Beccles in a pathetic sermon from the pulpit, lamented the recent sudden death of Rev. Mr. Heptinstall, dissenting minister of the place: an instance of liberality that conferred on the preacher the highest honour, as 'a fellow labourer in Christ's vineyard'. The amicable relation between Church and Congregationalists was a notable feature of religious and social life in Beccles.

According to Heptinstall's own account, there were only four remaining members of the church when he was asked to go to Beccles in 1773 and a further four joined just before he arrived. These members must, however, have been confident of further support, for

the minister had to be paid. Membership under Heptinstall increased to thirty-six in 1779 and forty-six in 1785. Some of these lived in neighbouring villages, so that the membership in Beccles itself was less than forty in the 1780's. However, there were others supporting the church — and presumably attending the services — besides those enrolled as members; for the annual accounts, signed by the men present at the annual meeting, include several names of non-members, as do the lists of subscribers to repairs and extensions to the church. A steady but unspectacular increase in membership continued through the 1790's, with a predominance of women. In two cases, wives who became members were joined by their husbands in a few months' time. A new member in 1791 was Mary Willby, whose husband was a member of the Town Corporation.

Many of the members seem to have been small tradesmen and craftsmen and their wives; and some were domestic servants. But there were also men of greater substance and several of great enterprise. Among the wealthier was Thomas Ebbs, a farmer of Mutford, whose daughter Mary married Joseph Heptinstall quite soon after his arrival in Beccles. In 1784 the Heptinstalls moved into a substantial house standing in large grounds. Presumably financial help came from the father-in-law, who contributed largely to the various funds for Church repairs and extensions. In 1813 he contributed £100 towards "the re-building of the Meeting House".

A prominent supporter of the Congregational church during Heptinstall's pastorate was S. M. Creed. The following advertisement appeared in the "Norwich Gazette" in January 1765 —

"Samuel Maltwood Creed, Upholsterer, Appraiser and Auctioneer in Beccles, having engaged again in the Upholstery Branch, takes this opportunity to acquaint the Public that he is going to lay in an entire fresh Stock in that Trade which will consist of Moreens, Harrateens, Cheneys, Datticks, and Furniture checks, Counterpains, Quilts, Rugs, Blankets, Bed-Ticks and ready made Curtains: together with all sorts of Paperhangings of the newest Patterns.

Such Gentlemen and Ladies as please to favour him with their commands, may depend upon having them executed in the genteelest Taste and with the utmost Despatch

Their most obedient and
humble Servant".

Very few tradesmen in the small towns advertised and few could boast such a varied stock. Creed was a man of enterprise. He was much in demand as an auctioneer at large sales of furniture, often outside Beccles. Thus in 1780 he was auctioneer at the sale of Robert Whatling, merchants of Sotterley — house, furniture, some stock, a farm of 100 acres and 16 horses — and in the same year he held a two-day sale of the furniture of John Hunt, surgeon at Loddon.

In 1787 his upholstery business was purchased by Boyce Maskill from Norwich. Though Creed was one of the most prominent tradesmen in Beccles, he was not elected to the Corporation, for the law debarred Non-conformists from local government.

Maskill, however, was elected within a few years of his coming to the town. He was a Churchman. About the same time as he sold his upholstery business, Creed, now well advanced in years — took into partnership as auctioneer, Samuel Crowe, who was a member of the Twenty-four and permanent under-surveyor to the Corporation, a position of considerable trust. In matters of business, then, there was no bar to partnership between Churchmen and Nonconformists.

Creed was benevolent. An account of his charity to prisoners in Beccles gaol is given in the chapter on Crime. He also contributed to repair funds of the Congregational Church and undertook some work in this connection. Among the expenses for 1780 appears an item of "£1. 17s. 8¾d. to S. M. Creed for lining Rev. Heptinstall's seat".

During Heptinstall's pastorate there were two schoolmasters among the Congregationalists — Thomas Lovewell and Charles Brightly. The latter was another man of enterprise. He had come to Beccles from Norwich in 1784. He and his wife joined the Congregational Church at Wrentham in 1785, but his name is found regularly amongst the signatories to the Annual accounts in Beccles from 1788 to 1794. The following year he moved to Bungay to join Richard Morris in a printing office. In 1809 Brightly wrote a pamphlet on stereotyping and the following year he bought the old Bungay Workhouse for £255, converting it into a printing works.

The financial records of the Congregational Church are preserved from 1729, the first entry being "Paid for this book £00 4s. 6d." The salary of Nicholas Phene, minister, in 1760, was £50 per annum. The salaries paid to Joseph Heptinstall and Isaac Sloper were as follows: —

Heptinstall	1773 — 84	50 pounds
	1785 — 92	50 pounds plus the surplus on the annual accounts e.g. in 1789 £2. 5. 0
	1793 — 95	63
	1796 — 1802	70
Sloper	1803 — 08	100
	1809 — 14	120
	1815 — 33	150

Thus the salary was almost doubled between 1795 and 1809. The rapid rise in the cost of living made some increase imperative. The minister's salary had to be met mainly by the annual payments of the subscribers. The following figures show how subscriptions rose to meet the increased cost of the minister's salary —

1785	41 pounds	1808	99 pounds
1793	54 pounds	1809	123 pounds
1796	60 pounds	1815	153 pounds
1803	68 pounds		

During the same period various sums were raised to pay for repairs, alterations and finally for a new Meeting House. Thus £75 was subscribed in 1780. A very much larger effort was made from 1809-15. First, a system of monthly subscriptions was instituted to start a building fund. This raised £73 in four years. Then in 1813 special subscriptions were called for and the call elicited a remarkable response: three men subscribed £100 each, one £65, one £35, two £30, and four £20; and the total for some forty subscriptions reached £915. 8s. 11d.

This, however, was by no means sufficient to pay for the new church. Rev. Sloper then undertook a preaching tour to augment the funds. He preached at twenty-one places in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, and London, the largest subscriptions being £54 from London and £40 from Yarmouth. The strength of the Congregational Church in Suffolk at this time is illustrated by the sums he obtained there —

Wrentham (little more than a village, but a Congregational stronghold) £34, Ipswich and Bury £18 each, Sudbury £17, Halesworth £15, Bungay £14, Southwold £13, Stowmarket £8.

Sloper's itinerant preaching brought in over £385, from which £35 were deducted for his expenses. The total cost of the land and building being £2140, the church had to borrow £700 from a Mr. Larke. Thomas Woodroffe, himself a Congregationalist, built the Meeting House; he was a man of earnest piety, fond of composing verses of gloomy conventional sentiments on religious themes. The friendly relationship between the Church and the Congregationalists was shown when Woodroffe was chosen in 1815 as one of two builders employed to report on, and later to remove, the cupola on the roof of the Parish Church. But dissension broke out among the Congregationalists not long after the arrival of Isaac Sloper. Several of his flock were dissatisfied with his preaching and four of them, including the miller Joseph Oldring, were excommunicated. These men formed a small Baptist group. Until such time as they could obtain a suitable Meeting House of their own, they made the provisional arrangement of hiring the Cockpit at the Black Boy for services —

"We the undersigned do agree to give to Mr. Harmer eight pounds eight shillings a year from 4 June 1804 to 4 June 1805 for the building called the Cockpit for the use of preaching the Gospel weekly on the Sabbath and one certain Day in the week as is convenient for our preachers to attend and at any time if wanted if convenient to Mr. Harmer except the two weeks that the building is used for Cocking at the time of Racing.

To these men it mattered nothing what the place of meeting was like. Any place would serve for the preaching of the Gospel. Still, a Cockpit was an extraordinary place to choose!

The Baptists remained a very small group until the coming of Rev. George Wright in 1822.

The Quaker records in Beccles date from 1735. They acquired a Burying Ground just outside the town, at Worlingham. Few in

number, they yet exercised great caution in admitting new members, as a letter to the Norwich Quakers in 1763 indicates. They refused to accept Augustine Reed because "he has been insolvent these three years past . . . you will, we trust, readily believe that, from the low condition of the County of Suffolk, we should be glad of the accession of new members; but you will no doubt for the same Reason see the Need we have to exercise all proper Caution". And they also maintained strict standards for their members —

"April 1765. Whereas it appears by many Minutes, standing in the Book of this Monthly Meeting, that Elizabeth Ashby jun. has been guilty of immoral conduct and as such dealt with by Order of the Meeting: And the Matter of Disowning the said Elizabeth Ashby deferred from Time to Time, in hoping and waiting with Christian Patience and Forebearance, that she might come to sincere Repentance and manifest the same by a Life and Conversation suitable: But contrary to this, and to the Concern of this Meeting, there is now a fresh Account upon good Authority, that the said Elizabeth Ashby is so far from demonstrating the long wished-for Repentance, that she is found to lead a very scandalous and ill life: Wherefore we judge it necessary that she be denied; and that a Paper of Disownment of the said Elizabeth Ashby be drawn up and brought to our next monthly meeting."

Another back-slider was dismissed in 1770 "Samuel Hunton of North Cove, who has for a long time past been addicted to gaming and the frequent Practice of Drinking to Excess . . . is not now deemed a Member of our Society".

It seems, however, that the Quakers who met at Beccles were considered lax in some matters. At the Quarterly Suffolk meeting in 1776 they were censured for failure to stand out against payment of tithes. Eventually they mended their ways. This entry occurs in the minutes of the Beccles monthly Meetings — "On the 30th of the 10th month 1789 came Benj. Chaston Warden and W. Cadmore Constable of Beccles with warrant signed John Farr and Robert Sparrow Justices and took out of the Till in the shop of Philip Pulleyn of Beccles aforesaid One Pound and nine shillings for Two Years Rates called Church Rates amounting with the charges to the said sum".

The most notable Quaker in Beccles was Joseph Sparshall, who died in 1810 aged 86. He was one of two druggists in the town. Page's Supplement to Kirby's "Suffolk Traveller" has the following note on Sparshall: "During the whole of his long life he devoted almost every moment he could spare to the acquirement of useful knowledge. Of Natural History in its various branches he was passionately fond; but botany, chemistry and electricity were his favourite studies. He wrote some essays on philosophical subjects; one of which, giving an account of a remarkable aurora borealis appeared in a volume of the "Philosophical Transactions" and procured him the offer of becoming a member of that learned Society, an honour which he had the modesty to decline".

The Quakers were always ready to help any of their number in distress. Thus in 1777 they disbursed from their scanty funds £12. 17s. 6d. to Isaac Beamish whose family were all ill with the small-pox and whose wife had died of that dreaded disease. Their charity was not confined to other Friends. In the will of Mary Sewell dated 1771 was the provision: "I give and bequeath the sum of £7 to the poor of Beccles to be laid out in bread . . . also eight chaldrons of coal to be disposed on to the poor that belong to Beccles aforesaid".

Bungay, too, had a prominent Quaker in Samuel Ashby, who attended the meetings in Beccles. Ashby's "Miscellaneous Poems" (1794) included a vigorous attack on Tom Paine in "The Illustrious Friends" — the Friends being Paine and Satan! It is surprising to find a Quaker writing on such a theme; and Ashby in his preface spoke of the possibility of his incurring "the malevolence of the Democrat". His long list of subscribers included well-known names; and amongst a total of fifty subscribers from Beccles were Robert Sparrow and Bence Sparrow, Isaac Blowers, Robert Davey and S. M. Creed.

There is little evidence of the influence of Methodism in Beccles until a considerably later period, though the town was certainly visited by itinerant Methodist preachers in the 1780's. It was then part of the Norwich circuit, which included also Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Loddon, Haddiscoe, Thurlton, North Cove and fourteen other places. Four preachers, based on Norwich, served this area. They had one horse between them. In 1782, one of the most remarkable of the Methodist preachers of his time, Adam Clarke, was appointed to the Norwich circuit, at the very early age of eighteen. During his year in this appointment, Clarke preached 450 sermons. Frequently he preached four times on Sundays, and on weekdays at 5 a.m., all summer and winter, wherever he could get 16—20 persons to listen. The winter of 1782-83 was very severe; snow fell intermittently from Christmas to mid-April. Clarke often slept in outhouses and lofts. In the labourers' cottages he found smoky turf fires. It was a hard life but Clarke was a man of resolute piety, dedicated to his chosen task. He was also a man of some learning and considerable ability. One of his associates in the Norwich circuit, John Ingram, on the other hand, was an example of the type of preacher who justified some of the popular prejudices against the Methodists. "He professed to cure many disorders: his prescriptions were made up of a pennyworth of oil of swallows etc. . . . he was a slave to tobacco, and never preached without a quid in his mouth," says Clarke's biographer.

There was no application for a licensed Methodist place of worship in Beccles until 1817. In Bungay, however, there was trouble at the licensed meeting house in 1811. Two young men entered the house used as a chapel and disturbed the congregation by talking loudly and swearing. They were brought before the local magistrates and paid a fine of £6 to be given away in bread to the poor, "to prevent the law being executed on them". This expression of anti-

Methodist prejudice was mild compared with the disreputable opposition at Wickham Market, where the Methodists had obtained a licence and appointed a preacher in September 1810. A large crowd, reported as no less than a thousand, assembled before the first Sunday service "to make as great a noise as possible". A mob gathered on successive Sundays and on one occasion a man mounted a cart and distributed loaves to heighten the enthusiasm of the shouters. On another occasion, several entered the chapel in masks, and by groans and affected attitudes attempted to ridicule the preacher. On yet another, an excavated turnip, filled with excrement, was hurled at the clergyman, who was also subjected to insults in the town. His horse was pelted with fireworks. On December 2nd the mob broke all the windows of the house and threatened its total destruction. The tardy protection of the law was invoked.

CHAPTER XI

The Courtship of the Rev. Isaac Sloper

In 1802 the Beccles Independent Church required a new minister. A scholarly and personable young man, not yet ordained, was sent for a few probationary weeks and delivered his first sermon on Sunday, November 7th. "After preaching for six Sabbaths, he was invited to come again to Beccles, and in the following April an invitation from the Church was presented to him to become their pastor". The young man, whose name was Isaac Sloper, accepted the appointment. He was 23 and unmarried.

The quotation in the paragraph above is from "Brief Records of the Independent Church at Beccles" (1837) by Samuel Wilton Rix, the first book written by that indefatigable local historian. More than fifty years later, long after the death in 1865 of Mary Ann, widow of Isaac Sloper, in her ninety-second year, Rix compiled in three large and weighty tomes, "Materials for Biography of the Rev. Isaac Sloper". There is a great deal of dull matter in these over-copious "materials"; but there is also much of human and historical interest, particularly in that part which relates to Isaac Sloper's courtship.

He was born at Devizes in Wiltshire in 1779 and was educated under Rev. Fenner, Presbyterian minister in that town. At the age of fifteen a post as clerk in the office of an attorney at Cheltenham was secured for him. He retained this post for three years. Some twelve years later he wrote "An account of particular occurrences in the life of I.S." —

"During my residence at Cheltenham, the serious impressions which I had acquired from the example, instruction and prayers of my parents were almost entirely destroyed. Though I verified the assertion of the wise man 'The way of transgressors is hard,' in process of time my conscience would more easily permit me to neglect prayer and the Scriptures, think lightly of the Sabbath, and prefer the society of the gay and dissipated to that of persons religious and grave. To the brink of ruin was I hurried . . . " And here a page of the manuscript has been heavily obliterated. Whether the deletion was made at some later time by Sloper himself or by Rix, whose idea of reticence was that of a religious mid-Victorian, is uncertain. It seems probable that Rix was responsible, for there are other deletions in some of Sloper's letters to his wife in the early years of their marriage and in a few instances some short passages have literally been cut out. These passages, as their contexts make sufficiently clear, were expressions of intimate love which to a man of Rix's generation it would have seemed highly improper to print.

Whatever the dissipations hinted at may have been, they did not last very long and were followed by a strong reaction. "Brought to see the evil of sin, and to feel the importance of true religion for the present life, and for a future state, I possessed a strong desire to devote myself to the solemn and arduous work of the Christian ministry, that I might labour to convince my fellow creatures of their danger and invite them to receive the grace of the blessed Redeemer, and seek the honour, riches and happiness of eternity".

The young man sought the advice of Rev. Cornelius Winter and was duly enrolled in 1797 into the dissenting academy at Homerton. He did not, however, devote all his time to study, for he made the acquaintance of Mary Ann Gould, to whom in 1802 we find him writing thus:

"My dear Friend,

Often have we together rambled the fields and enjoyed the pleasures of friendly conversation but the gratifying employment of addressing a line to you never till now fell to my happy lot.

Friendship brings pleasure to those who possess it and affords the same to those with whom they are connected, but how much superior is it when founded on Christian principles!

How often I have wished you here that together we might range the fields and enjoy the wonderful beauties of nature . . .

Yours affectionately,
I. Sloper."

Miss Gould was an orphan. She was also a friend of Rev. Winter and under the influence of his energetic piety. Isaac Sloper's letter could hardly fail to please her.

Soon after writing this letter, Sloper completed his studies at Homerton and spent his probationary weeks at Beccles. It was evidently indicated to him that the Beccles congregation would prefer

a married man. He was therefore anxious to marry, but not to marry on his meagre stripend alone. He could not afford a penniless wife. He consulted Cornelius Winter, who undertook to sound Miss Gould for him. In the course of a long letter, tactful and affectionate, Winter explained Sloper's position and prospects and proceeded to the crucial matter: "Thus much having been observed, I add a few questions for you to deliberate upon. 1st. Can you from this liberal statement of things give your person and affection to Mr. Sloper? 2nd. Are the restricted circumstances of £150 per annum (I suppose you bring him the interest of £1000 immediately) no obstacle to your acceptance of his addresses?"

Miss Gould's reply to this letter has not been preserved but it must have been immediate and favourable. Winter's letter is dated January 20th. A week later Sloper wrote his proposal of marriage. After some introductory sentiments, he came to the point thus: "I have lately been thinking of looking out for a Lady, to become my partner in life, to be a sharer of my cares as well as of my joys; that I may commence my residence at Beccles like a solid man, and be freed from the temptation of rambling about the country etc. etc.; and after looking round upon the females I have the honour of being acquainted with, there was no one more suitable for me than yourself.

I can't write to you like a frantic lover: I will not fill my sheet with fulsome compliments: I shall not tell you I am dying and shall quickly expire if you don't reply in the affirmative; but this with sincerity I say, I shall feel happy in calling you my nearest earthly friend; I shall feel happy in sustaining the important character of a husband to *you*; I shall feel happy, very happy in being united to you in that bond which death only ought to dissolve; *provided* our circumstances united will be sufficient to keep poverty from our door and supply us with those comforts which are essential to the existence of domestic happiness . . ."

Miss Gould did not hesitate. She must have written by return of post, for on January 31st Isaac Sloper acknowledged her acceptance in a letter from his parents' home at Devizes. He had received her letter before preaching in the morning and had not opened it until after the service. "However before my Dinner I bursted open the Epistle, the contents of which enabled me to take with composure my seat at the Table and to preach two spirited sermons afterwards . . ." He was to preach at fashionable Bath a few days later, and then he would take the coach to Kensington where Marian (as he now called her) lived. Their meeting was brief, for it was time for Isaac Sloper to return to Beccles. Once there, he set about the important business of finding a house. He wished to buy one immediately.

But he had no money and no expectations upon which he might raise any, apart from what Marian was to bring him. As Rev. Winter had told her, "his parents rank with the pious and decent poor, and have struggled to live decently . . ." His next letter was

over-sanguine. Marian lived in Kensington with a Mrs. Jones, a lady in very comfortable circumstances; Isaac suggested that Mrs. Jones might lend them £400. Now Mrs. Jones was very fond of Marian, but she was evidently unwilling to assist to this extent. She may well have felt that Marian Gould was marrying beneath her; and can hardly have viewed without alarm the penniless and impetuous young man's request.

Isaac was not to be discouraged. On March 22nd, he wrote: "Respecting the house, I shall finish the business with you by saying, that I have engaged to purchase at £500; on the signing of the deeds to pay down £200 (which I hope will be soon sent) and to let the remaining £300 continue as a mortgage on the premises, till convenient to pay the whole. No other plan could be adopted . . ." This urgent request — or demand! — caused alarm. In his next letter, one week later, he regrets "the uneasiness I caused you". Marian (or Mrs. Jones?) feared that he would be unable to buy any furniture, or would ask for more money to buy some! On this point he re-assured her. Moreover, he mentions "a plan to increase his prospective income. "I am now resolved (if it meets you approbations) of taking 3 or 4 young gents to board and educate at £40 per annum . . . tho' it will require a good exertion on my part united with the duties of the ministerial office". This was a generally accepted way for a minister to improve his income. Thus did he show a timely sense of financial responsibility, and concluded a very long letter on a note of solemn piety: "There is a Judgment day! There is another world! May we be happy in this life, and never have reason to repent of our union in that to come . . ."

It seems that no further objections were raised to sending the £200. Isaac could now refer to other matters. He had been working in the garden nearly every day. "I am now going to shoot the sparrows for stealing my peas!"

His next three letters are principally about furniture. Marian had some furniture in Kensington. He proposed that this should be sent by sea, as "the expense of water carriage is not quite so much as land carriage. In about 6 weeks there is a vessel sailing from London belonging to an acquaintance of mine at Yarmouth". But he advises that silver articles, plate, "and other little things had better be packed properly in a little deal Box and sent by the waggon which goes from the Saracen's Head, Snow Hill, every Saturday and arrives at Beccles towards the Thursday following".

He also found someone in Yarmouth who "has made the free and generous offer of letting me have anything in the upholstery and cabinet line and of suiting my own convenience as to payment. He brought me from Yarmouth in his chaise and took measure of the rooms in order to make the Bedsteads". The beds were to be four-posters, 8ft. high, 5ft. 3 ins. wide and 6ft. 6ins. long — really substantial structures! It was agreed that Marian should make the vallens for the beds and all the curtains for the windows of the house.

Isaac next proposed to engage as servant the girl who had been

with his predecessor, "a serious and very decent young woman". She had no objection to being engaged on a monthly basis ("It is a common practice here to hire servants by the month") and her wages would be six guineas per annum.

Thus were the important matters of house, furniture and a servant settled. Spring had come: the roads would be easier; and Isaac proposed to come to Kensington to see his fiancée and her friends. "I intend riding to London on horseback; therefore shall make two days of my Journey: but beyond a doubt if I don't break my horse's knees or my own neck I shall see you on Wednesday evening next. I am earnestly longing for you company, and hope that our next meeting will increase our affection and make us more desirous for a union too close to be described". He arrived safely, spent a few happy days and returned to Beccles by coach. The return journey proved unpleasant on account of "the company of a man in the Coach who had been discharged from one of the Hospitals in an incurable state. His complaint was sore legs, and oh! the very recollection of the legs, makes me expectorate!"

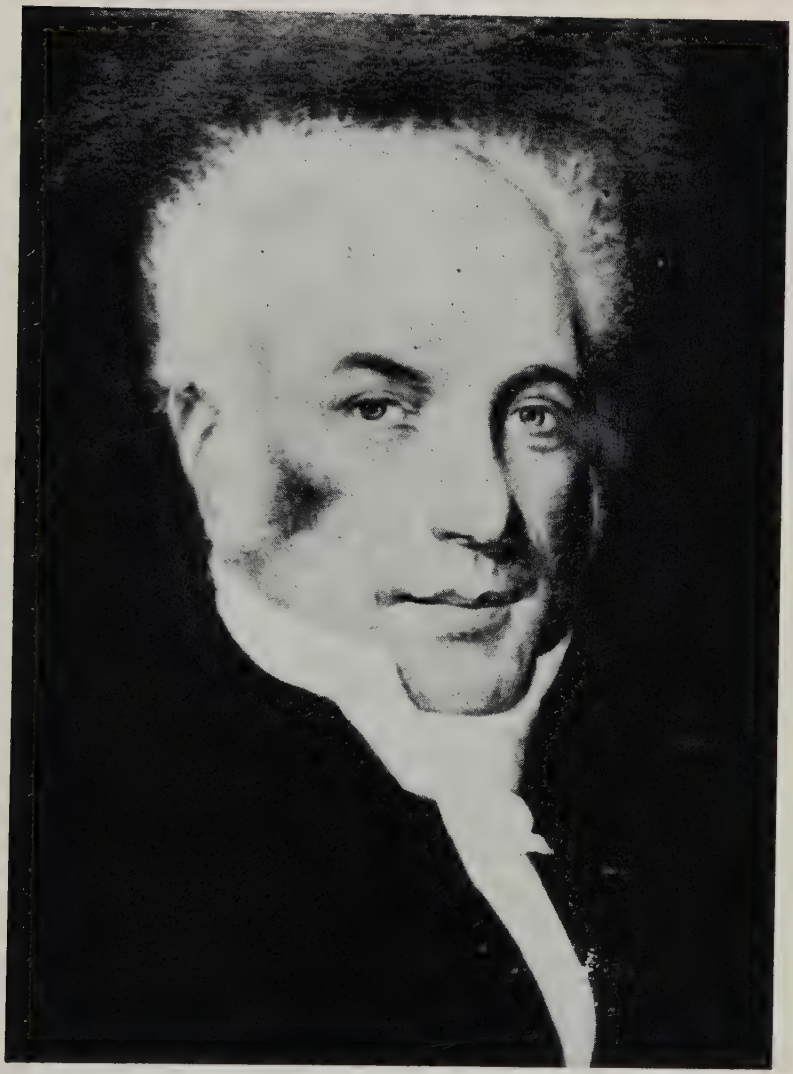
Isaac's ordination was to precede his marriage. The ceremony took place on July 7th 1803. More than twenty ministers were present on this occasion, whose solemnity made a deep impression on the young man.

The wedding was fixed for August 17th. On the 15th, Isaac left Beccles for London. He and his bride remained there for a fortnight after the wedding and then returned in leisurely fashion, in a one-horse chaise. He had arranged that they should arrive in Beccles in the middle of the week in order that Marian should meet some of his friends before having to appear at church on Sunday under the scrutiny of many strangers' eyes. It was a characteristically tactful plan.

The months from January to August had been momentous for Isaac Sloper. He had been accepted; he had made all domestic arrangements for married life; he had made two journeys to London; he had been ordained and he had married.

It is to Marian Gould that we owe the story of this brief early nineteenth century courtship. She kept Isaac's letters. And when in later years he travelled, preached sermons for the British and Foreign Bible Society, she continued to preserve them. They show that the marriage was happy and that mutual affection did not diminish.

There are other letters in Rix's "Materials", some about Church matters and others from various friends. Perhaps the most remarkable thing about them all is that, throughout the period 1802-15, there is no mention of the great struggle against Napoleon in which England was engaged. In and around Beccles there were encampments, and frequent arrivals and departures of the soldiers of many regiments. And during this time Isaac visited Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Norwich, Reading, Bocking, Witham, Hitchin, Devizes and Bristol. He was also in London several times for periods of about



Rev. Isaac Sloper

a fortnight. But not once did he or any of his correspondents refer to the war.

CHAPTER XII

The Ringing of the Bells

"The chimes, the chimes of Motherland,
Of England, green and old,
That out from fane and ivied tower
A thousand years have tolled;
How glorious must their music be
As breaks the hallowed day,
And calleth with a seraph's voice
A nation up to pray!

I love ye, chimes of Motherland
With all this soul of mine,
And bless the Lord that I am sprung
Of good old English line!
And, like a son, I sing the lay
That England's glory tells;
For she is lovely to the Lord,
For you, ye Christian bells!"

These verses of the American poet, Cleveland Coxe, treat with idealising nostalgia a familiar theme in English poetry. So Cowper begins his "Winter Walk at Noon" with a passage on listening to bells at a distance —

"With easy force it opens all the cells
Where memory slept."

But in Cowper's time, when Church bells rang out very frequently, and when they used on many occasions not specifically religious, they were sometimes a cause of local dissension.

In 1763 there occurred a rumpus over payment for new bells in Beccles Parish Church. At a Vestry meeting in April of that year a plan was agreed upon to settle the trouble:

"Whereas the eight bells belonging to this parish have been by the Churchwardens (with the consent of many of the principal inhabitants of this town) taken down in exchange for ten new Bells, which has caused some disputes and Dissension among the inhabitants

of the said town, concerning the ways and means of repaying the charge now it is ordered that Nicholas Harris Esq., William Orgill Esq., the Rev. John Lodington, and John Farr the younger gent, to determine the matters aforesaid and to order and award what part of the said expense shall be raised and levyed by the churchwardens' rates; which said Referees shall deliver on this determination, in writing to the present churchwardens on or before the sixteenth day of May next, and it is hereby further ordered, consented and agreed to, that such determination shall be conclusive and binding upon the said Parish, and that a Rate or rates shall be accordingly made by the churchwardens for the time being for raising such money (as shall be determined to be levyed and raised) at such times and in such parts and proportions as they, the said referees, shall order and appoint . . ."

This method of settling a dispute was found convenient in the eighteenth century — for whose authority would be less contested than of a strong group of the local gentry? But though the matter of payment was thus settled, the trouble was not ended. Only a year after his appointment as Rector of Beccles in 1764, Rev. Peter Routh found himself in trouble—and with no less a person than the Bishop—when an indignant parishioner lodged a complaint about the ringing of the bells.

Mrs. Anguish lived near the church. Proximity to the powerful peal, so recently augmented, was a reason for her complaint. "I am glad the church is not so close to the great house as often happens in old places. The annoyance of the bells must be terrible," Jane Austen's Maria Bertram remarks casually. But Mrs. Anguish had an additional and more urgent reason for her annoyance, for her sister, who lived with her, was ill. She complained to the Rector. His reply, dated Feb. 24th 1765, was as follows:

Madam,

I foresee so much trouble to myself from future applications of a like nature, if I make it my business to determine when the bells are to ring, that I must beg leave to decline your request, and refer you to the officers of the parish who have the keys of the steeple in their keeping, or, if you think it proper, to a parish meeting, when the matter may be finally settled to the satisfaction of all parties. I should be willing to oblige, but not to lay a foundation for unnecessary offence in any after emergence.

I am your very humble servant,

P. Routh.

Mrs. Anguish was so far from being satisfied with this reply that she immediately appealed, over the Rector's head, to the Bishop.

Little is known of Philip Yonge, formerly Bishop of Bristol, who had been translated to the see of Norwich in 1761.

Silas Neville made a characteristically sarcastic remark about him in an entry of 1772 in his Diary: "Heard an inanimate sermon at the Cathedral by Dr. Philip Yonge, Bishop of the Diocese, for the benefit of the Norfolk Hospital. This fat blown-up fellow is said to be one of the best preachers in the Establishment. But it is low in preachers, if

that is the case." He is said to have owed his preferment to political influence — a frequent cause of ecclesiastical advancement in the Church at that time. It may be significant that he was not residing in his diocese, but in London, when Mrs. Anguish's letter reached him. However, his response was as prompt and decisive as it was surprising—

Upper Grosvenor St.
April 4th, 1765.

Madam,

Your letter which, by its date, might have reached me last Saturday, did not come hither till yesterday — by the penny post too, and too late to be immediately answered; which it certainly should have been by last night's post if it had been possible. The following lines are what I have written today to Mr. Routh, and I hope he will do everything that can be wished for the ease and composure of your sister.

I am Madam,
Your most obedient servant,
P. Norwich.

The Bishop's letter to Peter Routh was as follows:—

Dear Sir,

I have received a complaint from Mrs. Anguish concerning the unreasonable, to say the least, ringing the bells at Beccles, together with a copy of a letter written by her to you and of an answer from you. I will first suppose that Mrs. Anguish has rightly stated the case of her sister's health, and of the disturbance given to her by unnecessary ringing, and then I will take leave to think that your caution is rather too great. However, that you may be eased of that burden, if it be too great a one, I will take the greatest share of it to myself, by desiring you to call to you the Churchwardens, and to acquaint them that by the 88th Canon of 1603, the bells are not to be rung at any time without *good cause*, to be allowed by you and them. And you will please to add my opinion that where any neighbour is in the situation in which Mrs. Anguish's sister is represented to be, it is absolutely impossible to assign a *good cause* for ringing the bells so near her, or indeed any. You will therefore please to decline (as at my desire) giving your approbation to any cause whatsoever, and to prevent by your negative the ringing of the bells unnecessarily, in the present circumstances.

I am etc.

This sarcastic and dictatorial letter presumably gave Mrs. Anguish the temporary respite from the bells which she desired. The Bishop did not even request Routh's view of the matter! Would he have acted in this way if Routh had belonged to a powerful family — if he had had those "connections" or that "interest" which between them determined so many matters in the eighteenth century? Probably not.

What could this "unnecessary ringing" be, of which Mrs. Anguish complained? Perhaps the ringers, who took a great pride in their art, may have been practising assiduously with the new and expensive peal. Or perhaps there had been a surfeit of ringing when — apart from weddings, funerals and the normal services — the bells had been tolled for local occasions. For tolled they certainly were with great frequency

and for long periods. Coleridge, recalling in "Frost at Midnight" the days of his childhood during the 1770's, refers to

> "the old church-tower,
> Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
> From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day."

And in "The Village Curate" (1788) the Fair-day is thus described:

> "The happy morning comes, expected long
> By lads and lasses. Soon as light appears,
> The swain is ready in his Sunday frock,
> And calls on Nell to trip it to the Fair.
> The village bells are up, and jangling loud
> Proclaim the holiday."

The bells were rung for races and for rural sports, for the return of local gentry from travel or from honeymoon, for coming-of-age celebrations, indeed for any joyful occasion — such as this strange one in Beccles in December 1771:

"Upon the arrival of the post yesterday, which brought the agreeable news of the very honourable exculpation of Francis Matthew Schutz Esq. before Lord Chief Justice De Grey, of the horrid charge laid against him by his brother, John Schutz Esq, a heart-felt joy appeared in every countenance, the bells were immediately set aringing and the guns fired. In the evening, the gentlemen of the town met at the tavern to drink the health of himself and lady etc. The cheerful night concluded with fire-works, illuminations and every demonstration of joy that could be exhibited."

Not only local, but national events also called for celebration in which the ringing of the bells was required. During the Napoleonic wars ringings became especially frequent. No man has caused more hearty bell-ringing than Nelson, whose victories never passed without such notice, loud and long, in his native East Anglia. The Churchwardens' accounts tell the story — a selection of items shows some of the occasions when the bells were rung, and the payments to the ringers. There were two annual local events on which the Churchwardens paid the ringers from church funds: Election Day (the election of the town Portreeve) and the Races, the former costing half a guinea and the latter five shillings. Ringing on Christmas Day was also customary. Besides these we find—

1760–61	Ringing for the return of the Militia	£1	1	0
	on the Coronation	£2	2	0
1761–62	for Pondicherry	£1	1	0
	on Christmas Day		10	6
1763–64	for the Peace	£1	1	0
	To the Norwich Ringers when the new bells were opened	£2	2	0
1766–67	For ringing when the Bishop Confirmed	£1	5	0
	(was this "unnecessary ringing"!)			

and so on. The charges for ringing steadily increased. In 1787–88 the ringers were paid £8.15.0 by the Churchwardens. Their standard

charge had been raised from a guinea to £1.5.0 in the sixties; in 1791–92 it was increased to £1.10.0. In 1804–05 their charges amounted to £17.5.0. In 1806–07 the standard charge rose to £1.16.0.

These accounts show only the payments made by the Churchwardens. There were many other payments and these were often more lucrative. John Gowing, a Beccles bell-ringer for many years, kept a diary in which he recorded all manner of events, some of national but most of local interest; and of both the occasions of bell-ringing (including often the important matter of payment to the ringers) are prominent:

1782	August	Miss Carter married 3 guineas for wringing.
	October	Miss Holmes married 2 guineas for wringing.
1783	March	Miss Read married 2 guineas for wringing.
	June	Miss N. Holmes married 2 guineas for wringing.
	Dec. 15th	Mr. Crabb m. to Miss Elmy.
	19th	Mr. Crab came home. Wrung a peal, 3 guineas.
1784	July	The news came that Lord Howe defeated the French fleet.
1785	Jun.	Mr. Chamber came home from Scotland: married Miss Hurrell: raised the bells: 2 guineas for ringing, 18/6 spent at Mrs. Brames'.
	Dec.	Miss Ferrier married; 3 guineas.
1787	Oct.	Mrs. Gillingwater buried: the dumb peal raised at night.
1788	Jan.	Robert Rede brought home his wife: ringers 2 guineas.
	June	Mrs. Lillistone buried: rung the mourning peal: 1.11.6.
1789	April 23.	The thanksgiving day for the King's recovery. The town illuminated.
	Dec.	Mrs. Crowfoot buried by torchlight: the bells bumbled. Began at 4, ceased at 9. 2 guineas for ringing.
1790	Oct.	Wringing for Sir Gerald Vanneck.
1792	June	Mr. Thos. Farr married to Miss Gooch. 5 guineas for ringing. Old Mr. Farr gave 10s. for drink.
	Oct.	Old Mr. Carter buried, the bells bumbled.
1793	March	John Bane brought his wife home: raised the bells, 7 o'clock, ceased between 11 and 12 night. £1.6.0.
1796	July	Old Mr. T. Rede brought his wife home. 3 guineas for ringing.
	August	Doctor Davey brought his wife home: 3 guineas for ringing.
	Sept.	Charles Aldred married to Miss Holmes. one guinea: no ringing.
1797	Jan.	Charles Chinery married to Eliz. Bardwell. Gave £1.5.0 to drink.

	May	Mr. Robt. Davey buried. Freemasons walked in procession: mourning peal.
	Aug. 7th	Mr. Sparrow married last Tuesday: came to Worlingham today. 5 guineas for ringing.
	Dec.	Wringing. Thanksgiving day for the victorys gained over the French, Dutch and Spanish fleets.
1798	Sept.	Capt. Hunter of Yarmouth married to Miss Betsy Hunter. 2 guineas for ringing.
	Oct.	Great news from Horatio Nelson, who took 9 ships of the line. Wringing.
	Nov.	Miss Creed married to Mr. Hook. One guinea.
	Dec.	Mrs. Chase buried. Mourning peal One guinea.
1799	Sept.	The Dutch resigned their fleet to Lord Duncan.: raised the bells.
1800	August	Old Mrs. Meene died: 91 age: mourning peal.
	Dec.	Mrs. Warters married to Mr. David Kemp: 2 guineas for ringing.
1801	Feb.	Mr. Simmonds married to Miss Cross: 3 guineas for ringing.
	March	Old Rowland Howard married to Sarah Skerry: 2 guineas for ringing, and 10/- spent.
		Woolner married to Mary Smith: one guinea.
	April	Lord Nelson defeated the Danes.
	May	Mr. Browne married to Susan Boby: 2 guineas for ringing.
	June 2	Mr. William Elmy died: age 87. June 9. buried. The mourning peal. One guinea.
	Oct.	Mr. Dashwood married to Miss Gooch. 2 guineas for ringing.
	Oct. 3rd.	News came that peace was signed: raised the bells. Oct. 11th Peace is ratified: raised the bells.
1802	May	Robert Harmer churchwarden died. Mourning peal £1.1.0. drink 10/6.
1802	June	Raised the bells for young Mr. Crowfoot (Doctor) lately married, brought his wife to town: one guinea for ringing.
		Tuesday the first of June upwards of 1800 people received one pound of beef, quart of porter, and threepenny loaf, and a peck of coals to each family. The Thanksgiving Day for Peace: 2 guineas for the ringers besides the day's pay: spent a dinner at Wm. Harmer's
1803	March	Wringd a bumbled peal. Old T. Utting died.
	May	Doctor Purvis buried. Toll 4 hours.
	Sept.	Mr. Sloper brought his wife home. 2 guineas for ringing.
	Dec.	Raised the bells for Miss Bacon married to Mr. Hussey. Lady Bacon give 3 guineas.

1804 August Mr. Stuart married to Miss Bohun. 3 guineas for ringing.
Mr. Welch married to the widow Mayhew. For ringing one guinea. 5s. spent.
Nov. Mr. Smyth brought his wife home: 4 guineas for ringing.

The year 1805 was a vintage one for the ringers. Their fees for marriages and deaths, as recorded by Gowing, amounted to some £16. Their fees from the Churchwardens were £17.5.0. They must in fact have earned a good deal more, for he did not record payments received at less than a guinea a time.

1805 July Raised the bells for Miss Sparrow married to Mr. Acheson. Mr. Sparrow give 5 guineas to the ringers.
Oct. Mr. Arnold buried. Mourning peal £1.11.6.
Mr. John Crisp married to Miss Prentice: 3 guineas. Mr. William Buck married: 1 guinea. Miss Stanford married to Mr. Banks: raised the bells: one guinea. Rev. Mr. Boston married to Miss Carthew: ringers 4 guineas.
Nov. 7th Dark, cloudy, foggy day. Lord Nelson defeated the French and Spanish fleet, took 19 ships of the line: sunk one: lost his life: mourning peal: night.
Nov. 12th News came today, 4 ships of the combined fleet taken: bells raising.
Dec. 5th Thanksgiving day for the Victory gained by Lord Nelson. Wringing. Allowance 8s.
1806 Jan. 9th Lord Nelson buried in St. Paul's Church, London. Bells tolled here from 10 till 2. Afternoon minute gun fired 1 hour: then a mourning peal.

These extracts show the payments made to the ringers by the well-to-do, and some of the national occasions when there was special ringing. They show, too, duration of ringings, sometimes of four hours. But they hardly indicate the frequency of the ringing, since they exclude ringing for marriages and burials where the fee was less than a guinea, for annual local occasions and for the ordinary church services. Had it been true that church bells were "the poor man's only music", then the poor man could hardly have complained of a musical dearth. But Coleridge forgot the fiddle in the inn, accompanying rustic songs and dances. And during the Napoleonic wars there was in Beccles, as in many East Anglian towns, a constant coming and going of militia. There must have been much stirring and varied martial music. Still, the church bells took pride of place.

A humorous work of the 1780's "Modern Manners; or, the Country Cousins", written as a series of poetical epistles, contains these lines where Lady D. writes to Lady S. on the annoyances of country life —

"What's worse than sitting in the boxes
With grocers' wives and oilmen's doxies?
What's worse than lonely country houses?
What worse than tete à tete with spouses?
Worse than a puny infant's cries,
Long sermons, dismal tragedies?
What worse than bells on birthday ringing?. . ."

But these were not the sentiments of the ordinary citizen, to whom the ringing of the bells was part of his inheritance, a welcome and reassuring sound — unless, like Mrs. Anguish, he lived in the shadow of a great church tower.

CHAPTER XIII

Amusements: The Drama

In 1756 the "Norwich Gazette" recorded thus the performance of a play at Bungay by desire of the Beccles Masons: "They set out from the Lodge at Beccles, accompanied by a Number of the Fair Sex by Water, and were saluted at their Landing in Bungay with firing of Guns and Ringing of Bells; after Dinner they proceeded to proper Business in the Lodge, and were usher'd to the Playhouse with Musick preceding, amidst a numerous Throng of People. The Play of "A Wonder! a Woman keeps a Secret" was play'd for their Entertainment which was universally approved of; and every Thing carried on with Great Decorum. The Night concluded with a cheerful Glass and Firing of Guns."

This was typical eighteenth century pleasure — a full day's outing of a mixed party, much noise and jollification, substantial eating and drinking. Plays at this time were performed by strolling companies wherever they could hire a building large enough to hold an audience. Inns, and even barns, were used, but more often there was an Assembly Room; only in the large towns had a theatre been built. Norwich could boast a fine theatre at whose opening performance in 1758 a thousand people were present — such was the popularity of the drama. Theatres like that at Norwich attracted the best players, often from London. But the small strolling companies led a precarious life and were woefully short of costumes and properties. In the reminiscences of the actor Bernard there is a vivid picture of the adventurous life of such a company. The young man was a member of a company touring in Suffolk in 1774. "At our next town, Stowmarket, we were destined to encounter an audience so extremely taciturn, that we knew not

whether to give them credit for wisdom or stupidity. At last we discovered the cause: so powerful was their illusion, so entire their absorption in the interest of the play, that they forgot the means by which they were excited, and forbore to express their feelings, from an idea of its impropriety; they absolutely conceived that any notice would have annoyed us. However, our audience were at length aroused, owing to the following circumstance — Mr. Scott, my fellow-hero in the company, being a Mason, was in the habit of delivering an entertainment of 'Readings and Recitations' whenever he stumbled upon a village that contained a lodge. On the Monday, we were to perform the 'Bold Stroke for a Wife' in which he did the Colonel. He had quitted us on Saturday, to take a survey of the country, with the promise of returning to rehearsal on the 'play day'. He did not keep his word; but as we knew him to be 'dead perfect' (having played the piece before) and he was proverbial for punctuality, this gave us no concern: his part was read. At six o'clock, however, a rough-headed, red-faced ragamuffin of a ploughboy arrived with a note from an adjacent village, where it appeared the whole community had risen up to detain him among them that evening, for the gratification of attending his 'Reading' — such a particular case, he hoped, would plead his excuse, and he therefore sent us timely notice, that we might change the play. A general council of the company ensued, to decide what performance should be substituted. After canvassing the merits and peculiarities of twenty pieces, 'The Orphan' appeared to be the least difficult, and we fixed upon it. Two other queries were now to be considered, whether, and how, we should acquaint the public with a change. Mr. Osborne remarked that, as we expected a full house for the Comedy (the title, 'A Bold Stroke for a Wife' being very attractive in small country towns, where there are a great many unmarried young people), he feared that the announcement of a tragedy would turn money from the doors; and as that event was less desirable to the company than the public enlightenment, it was decided nem-con that 'The Orphan' should be represented instead of the 'Bold Stroke', but without any promulgation; thus leaving it to the critical acumen of our audience to distinguish between Thalia and Melpomene!

The night came — the house filled — the curtain went up — the play went on — moreover, it went down; not a whisper was heard — not a fan agitated — not a hand struck its fellow: one would have thought not a heart beat — all was observation and quiescence as usual, the spectators gazing upon us as though we were certain unearthly appearances; the same rising of the brow, drooping of the jaw, propping of the chin, and settling of the eye, continuing from the commencement to the close of the act. On this occasion we were not inclined to murmur at the silence, fearing that the first exclamation would be our detection. But fate willed it otherwise. The play proceeded, and nothing occurred to disturb the audience, till, in the midst of the fourth act, when I (as Castalio) addressing Monimia's maid, exclaimed in reply to her refusal to admit me — "By Heaven! I'll scale the window and get in by force,

Let the glad consequence be what it may", at which an old lady,

in a high-crowned critical cap, with spectacles on her nose, and her peaked chin propped on an ivory-headed cane (who had sat mute and motionless all the evening with the rest) suddenly relaxed her fixidity and exclaimed, giving three emphatic taps with her staff — 'Bravo, young man, bravo — that's a bold stroke for a wife, indeed!' Whether it was the example of so respectable a person, or a general concurrence in the justice of her criticism I do not know — but the impulse was electrical — the train was fired; tongues, hands and heels were loosened to the welcome office and a universal explosion of approbation took place."

The Company proceeded to Needham and Dedham, where Bernard's talents were spotted by two Aldermen of the city of Norwich who were part-proprietors of the Norwich Theatre. He received an immediate offer to play fops and light comedy at a salary of thirty shillings a week; and thenceforward he moved in a more exalted theatrical circle. But he had evidently enjoyed his apprenticeship, concluding his account with an amusing anecdote of the company at Dedham —

"The stage-struck son of a neighbouring farmer, who had lately joined the company, and received for his services leave to put on stage clothes, was entrusted (through necessity) with the part of Catesby in 'Jane Shore', and at the scene where he suddenly appears to arrest the unfortunate woman and her friend, instead of saying 'Seize on them both as traitors to the state!', he turned the last word into 'stage', at which the solitary occupant of our boxes responded in a very audible tone, 'Bravo, that's the best reading I have heard to-night!'"

Conflicting accounts have been given of stolling companies like the one young Bernard had joined, which certainly boasted little in the way of equipment. "The scenery consisted of a few wings and drops; a castle, an interior and a gloomy wood. The house was lighted with circles stuck in hoops — the wardrobe was of a piece with the next of the properties. One wig served for the whole range of first rate characters. It ornamented the head of Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Richard, Alexander, and the fops in comedy." Companies like this had visited Beccles early in the eighteenth century, when it was customary for a drum to be beaten in the market place to announce the arrival of the players. Tollet's company performed "Romeo and Juliet" at Beccles in 1724. But by the middle of the century, some superior companies had already been formed. These made a regular circuit of several larger towns and sometimes visited the smaller ones. The Norwich Company visited Beccles, for example, in 1761, and advertised thus in "The Norwich Gazette":

By the Norwich Company
By particular desire of Lady Bacon
At the Town Hall in Beccles on Monday August 17th
will be perform'd the
MASQUE OF COMUS
with Polly Honeycomb

This visit began on August 10th and ended on August 31st, when the advertisement ran:

BECCLES

Never acted here — and positively the last Night of performing this Season.

For the yearly benefit of Mr. and Mrs. Chambers
At the Town Hall in Beccles on Monday August 31st
will be presented a new COMEDY called
THE JEALOUS WIFE
with several Entertainments of Singing between the Acts
To which will be added a FARCE called
High Life Below Stairs
with a MOCK MINUET

Tickets to be had and Places taken at the White Lion, King's Head, and of Mr. and Mrs. Chambers at Mr. Chaston's, Glover, in the Bridge Street.

The Stage will be laid open, so as to render the House cool, agreeable and commodious.

Stage and Pit 2s. 6d, Gallery 1s.

To begin exactly at Half an Hour after Six O'Clock.

Other plays performed during the season were "The New Earl of Essex", "The Careless Husband" (generally considered Cibber's best play), "King Henry VIIIth" and "The Way to Keep Him". Names of Patrons included: Mrs. Suckling of Roos Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Sparrow, the Antient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, and Beccles Corporation. The gulf between the Norwich Company and the company Barnard described is illustrated by the difference in costumes: in 1784 there were 145 costumes in the Ladies' Wardrobe list.

The year 1784 was a dramatic landmark for Beccles. The superiority of Bungay's theatre had resulted in a paucity of drama at Beccles during the 1770's; but in 1784 a new theatre was opened at Beccles, with great eclat, "By a Company of Comedians from the Theatres of London, Dublin, York and Edinburgh." This was the company of William Scraggs, who became a regular visitor to the town for over twenty years until his death in 1808. A torchlight procession marked his funeral. He was buried in Beccles churchyard, where his tombstone may still be seen.

During Scraggs' first visit, the New Theatre had a season of eight weeks. Performances were three times a week. The Company opened with "The Beggar's Opera" which was repeated as the final performance. Support was good, in spite of the time of year — late January to March 20th; and the "Norwich Mercury" reported "the plays at Beccles have been received by a polite and numerous audience with the warmest applause and every mark of genuine approbation." Plays were bespoken by "The Gentlemen of the King's Head (Saturday's) Club", "The Ladies of Beccles", "The Gentlemen Bachelors of Beccles and Its Environ", Mr. and Mrs. Esdaile — James Esdaile was Portreeve in 1784 — and by Sir Edmund and Lady Bacon. The plays were of excellent quality. Shakespeare was represented by "Hamlet". There were Farquhar's "The Recruiting Officer" and "The Beaux Stratagem" and Sheridan's "The School for Scandal" as well as two of the best and most popular eighteenth century tragedies, "George

Barnwell" and "Jane Shore." Such was the dramatic fare accepted by the educated society of a small market town and district at this time. Standards were extraordinarily high.

There was a small orchestra "The Music composed and the Band conducted by Mr. Tatnal, from the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden." This must have added considerably to the cost of production. Nor had money been spared elsewhere — "The Scenery and Machinery entirely new."

Mr. Barrett and his successor, Mr. Brunton, managers of the Company whose headquarters was the Theatre Royal, Norwich, hired the new theatre annually. The rent was often in arrears. In 1804 the Corporation accounts show £75 owing. It is safe to assume that there were plays every year, for the Company would not have paid an annual rent otherwise.

Occasionally there were variations in the dramatic fare. Thus in 1798 "Mirth's Museum: or, Three Hours' Heart's Ease" was produced at Norwich, and later taken for single performances to Bury, Cambridge, Beccles, Bungay, Thetford and Dereham. It was given by Mr. Palmer from Drury Lane and Messrs. Waddy and Townsend from Covent Garden and consisted of Recitations, Readings, Songs and Imitations in three parts

1. Loyal Address and Songs.
2. Beauties of Shakespeare and Songs.
3. Imitations of well-known Actors.

During the years of war — and during the years of distress afterwards — it was customary for occasional performances to be given for the benefit of the poor. Whilst there is no reason to doubt the benevolence of the motive, this practice must have blunted the edge of opposition to the theatre, on moral and religious grounds, which was considerable in towns such as Halesworth, where Dissent was strong. Fisher's Company encountered opposition there. Then there was rivalry between his Company and Hounslow's in disputed theatrical territory. Fisher had followed Hounslow at Sudbury, and reported "overflowing houses" in August 1792. His rival managed to have the following inserted in the newspapers the following week — "If the spirit of the place make the present Old Barn overflow, what may not Mr. Hounslow expect, when the next Spring opens the new and elegant Theatre now preparing for him there, with a company more numerous and at least equally respectable". Another town where both companies appeared was Lowestoft; Hounslow was there in 1790 and 1792, Fisher in 1794.

Eventually Fisher's Company won supremacy. David Fisher, the manager, established his own theatre in the market towns of Norfolk and Suffolk — at Halesworth in 1809, Wells 1812, Woodbridge and Sudbury 1814, Eye in 1815, Dereham 1816, Beccles 1819 and several others including Bungay in the 1820's. This testifies both to Fisher's business ability and enterprise and to the strong and continuing support for the drama in East Anglia. Beccles Corporation was consistent in its support and a typical entry, in the Corporation accounts for 1787, suggests that its members enjoyed their evening —

"Wine on the day the play was bespoke — 11.7½."

CHAPTER XIV

Amusements: The Races, etc.

Races continued to be a popular amusement in the second half of the eighteenth century. An Act of 1740 had regulated the weights which horses had to carry and had raised the minimum stakes. This is said to have abolished some small country meetings, but there remained seventy-two places in England where race-meetings were held. East Anglia had many. At the principal towns and many of the smaller ones there were annual meetings of two or three days. Ipswich had a three-day meeting in early June and Beccles a two-day meeting later in the month. Races at Wisbech were in June, at Bury in July, at Swaffham in September, at Thetford in October. There were some variations in these dates, but over-lapping was avoided. Thus Beccles races were later held in September, often a few days before the Yarmouth meeting.

All race-meetings were advertised. The "Ipswich Journal" for April 16th 1759 carried this announcement above the names of the stewards, John Affleck and Nathaniel Acton:

BECCLES RACES — June 25th and 27th
To enter at the White Lion on June 20th between 11 and 12 noon.

All disputes to be determined by the Majority of the Subscribers at the Ordinary, not interested in the event, and their determination to be final.

Public breakfasting during the Races, at the Long Room, and Assemblies each night, as usual.

No person will be allowed to have a Booth on the Common, or sell any Liquor there, that does not subscribe at least five shillings to the Town Purse; to pay for the Ground before they build their Booths."

A further advertisement early in June gave details of the Cock-fighting and also announced: "There will be an Ordinary the second day for the Ladies."

There seems to have been a good deal of trouble over the Booths on the Race Ground, for twenty-five years later, when Thomas Gooch Esq. was Steward, it was announced: "No Publican will be permitted to build a Booth or Scaffold on the Race Ground or sell any Liquor there without paying Half a Guinea towards the Town Purse."

The usual prizes at the smaller meetings like that at Beccles, were of £50. On the first day was the "Gentleman's Purse of £50" — best of three Heats, twice round the course for a Heat, one guinea entrance and half a guinea to the Clerk of the Course. Non-subscribers two guineas. On the second day was the "Town Purse of £50" — best of

three Heats, three times round the course. Three guineas entrance and half a guinea to the Clerk."

Until 1769 it seems that there was no permanent structure on the course, but in that year Sir John Rous and other gentlemen obtained permission from the Corporation for William Buck, carpenter, to erect "a stand or building". In spite of this, the mass of spectators were not under the stewards' control and in 1772 an accident occurred. "During the running of the second heat, the spectators standing within the ground pressed forward so much that several were beat down both by the Horse and Mare, and two were so terribly bruised that their recovery was doubtful . . ."

Great crowds attended these meetings. Rich and poor rubbed shoulders here, as they did at boxing matches and in the cock-pit. The Church bells rang out. The inns were crowded. Booths on the course sold refreshments, solid and liquid. It was a time of convivialty and of feverish excitement.

A German visitor recorded his impression of the animated scene on the Course at Newmarket: "An interminable grassy plain, covered with a thick short turf, is the ground . . . near the end, the course is enclosed between ropes, on the outside of which rows of carriages, three and four deep, are drawn up, generally without horses, and covered within and without, from top to bottom, with spectators. At the goal itself is a wooden house on wheels, so that it can be moved about in case the course is lengthened or shortened: in this sits the judge. Just opposite to him is a post fixed in the ground, by means of which he determines which horse's nose first appears exactly on a line with it. At a certain distance from the goal, about a hundred paces to the side of it, stands another white post, called the betting post. Here the bettors assemble, after they have seen the horses saddled in the stable at the beginning of the course. The scene which ensues would to many appear the most strange that ever was exhibited. In noise, uproar and clamour it resembles a Jews' synagogue, with a greater display of passion. The persons in the drama are the first peers of England, livery servants, the 'lowest sharpers' and 'black-legs' — in short, all who have money to bet here claim equal rights. Dukes, lords, grooms and rogues shout, scream and halloo together, and bet together, with a volubility, and in a technical language, out of which a foreigner is puzzled to make anything: till suddenly a cry is heard, 'The horses have started!' In a minute the crowd disperses, but the bettors soon meet again at the ropes which enclose the course. You see a multitude of telescopes, opera-glasses, and eye-glasses, levelled from the carriages, and by the horsemen, in the direction from which the jockeys are coming. With the speed of the wind they are seen approaching; and for a few minutes a deep and anxious silence pervades the motley crowd; while a manager on horse-back keeps the course clear, and applies his whip without ceremony to the shoulders of any intruder. Once more rises the wildest uproar, shouts and lamentations, curses and cheers re-echo on every side. 'Ten to four upon the Admiral!', 'A hundred to one upon Madam Vestris!'. 'Small beer against the Field!' are heard from the almost frantic bettors: and scarcely do you hear a 'done!' here and there,

when the noble animals are before you — past you — in the twinkling of an eye; the next moment at the goal, and luck, or skill or knavery have decided the victory."

Such was Newmarket; and such, on a smaller scale, must have been meetings like these at Beccles. They were also becoming, towards the end of the century, social occasions. A Bath hairdresser was at Ipswich before and during the Races "to dress for the Ladies". Even at a small town like Swaffham the presence of a fashionable hairdresser could be expected —

"Ward and Brother, Hair Dressers from St. James's, London and Bath in the Season . . . at the Black Swan, Yarmouth, for the Bathing Season, at Swaffham Races, Lynn Feast and Bury Fair, as usual." This was in 1784. At the Swaffham Meeting that year there was an Assembly on the first evening and a Concert of vocal and instrumental music on the second. There was also a Cricket Match: "Gentlemen of Swaffham against the Gentlemen of Castleacre, twenty guineas a side. Wickets to be pitched at eight o'clock precisely" — a remarkably early start!

The advertisement for Beccles Races in 1802 shows a representative of the wealthy Vanneck family as one of the Stewards; and among those present at the Races in that year were Lord and Lady Huntingfield, Lord Brome and family, Sir John Blois, Joseph Windham Esq. and a large party. This aristocratic company, however, attracted at least one thief, for a certain gentleman had £135 picked from his pocket. A suspect was chased and eventually caught, but released for want of sufficient evidence.

Two notable innovations occurred in 1808 and 1811. In the former year, there was for the first time a Tradesmen's Ball on the second race night; and in the latter, a Cup for Hunters was offered, "to leap gates or hurdles to be placed across the course." It seems that the popularity of Beccles Races increased in these last years of the war. "The Norwich Mercury" reported in 1813: "the course thronged with company in chariots, landaus, barouches, gigs etc. . . . the stand crowded with the beauty and fashion of the county . . . assemblies and rural gardens numerously attended." Entertainments at the rural gardens became increasingly popular. In 1815, for the first time, they were (by permission of the Corporation) illuminated; a band and "an eminent singer from Drury Lane" were engaged. Included in the programme of songs were some of topical interest —

The Death of Nelson, He was fam'd for Deeds of Arms, The Ladies, Tom Moody (Hunting Song), Wellington the Brave, The Joys of the Chase, etc.

Cock-fighting was a regular feature of the various entertainments at country race meetings. A typical announcement of 1772 ran: "On Thursday 25th and Friday 26th of this Instant June, there will be a main of COCKS fought during the Races at Beccles, between the Gentlemen of the City of Norwich and Gentlemen in the County of Suffolk: to shew Twenty-seven Mains and Ten byes, for Two Guineas a Battle and Ten the odd Battle. The first Pair of Cocks to be pitted precisely at Twelve o'clock."

At the 1802 meeting, the cocking was advertised: "to show 21 mains and 7 byes; to fight 5 guineas per battle and 25 guineas the odd" — considerably higher stakes than in the 1770's.

Gambling, frequently for high stakes, was customary in all sports in the eighteenth century; money was invariably staked, for example, on cricket matches. The stakes at the Beccles cock-fighting were not comparatively high. In 1770 there was Cocking at the Rampart Horse, Norwich, with stakes at "Six Mains, Five Guineas a Battle and one hundred guineas the odd." This was one of several Norwich inns where cocking took place. It was good business, as this announcement of a two-day event shows —

"A Main of Cocks will be fought between the Gentlemen of Attleborough and the Gentlemen of Norfolk at the White Hart, Attleborough.

N.B. There will be a good ORDINARY each day."

Yarmouth was a centre for cock-fighting and meetings there sometimes lasted for three days. The charge for admission to the Pit was two shillings. Much cock-fighting also took place at Swaffham, where there was a three-day match in 1764.

The brutal passions aroused by cock-fighting are shown in an anecdote of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' for April 1789 in an obituary of John Ardesoif "a young man of large fortunes and in the splendour of his carriages and horses, rivalled by few country gentlemen . . . Mr. A. was very fond of cock-fighting, and had a favourite cock, upon which he had won many profitable matches. The last bet he laid upon the cock he lost: which so enraged him that he had the bird tied to a spit and roasted alive before a large fire. The screams of the miserable animal were so affecting, that some gentlemen who were present attempted to interfere, which so enraged Mr. A. that he seized a poker and with the most furious vehemence declared, that he would kill the first man who interposed; but, in the midst of his passionate asseverations, he fell down dead upon the spot." Here was a story "to point a moral". Cowper, in 'The Cock-fighter's Garland', took the opportunity, and described the sudden death as "the judgement of the skies".

Cock-fighting, besides being an amusement of the idle rich — or an obsession, as in the case of John Ardesoif — was a business. An advertisement of 1786 reads: "Cocking. A main of Cocks will be fought at the Theatre in Bungay on Monday and Tuesday Feb. 27th and 28th. The Gentlemen of Suffolk against the Gentlemen of Norfolk: to show 25 Mains and 10 Byes; to fight five guineas a Battle and twenty the odd.

Horth and Hawke, Feeders."

Business and pleasure were also combined at the annual Fairs. There were hundreds of such Fairs in England during the eighteenth century, though their importance for trade was declining towards the end of the period as the number of shops increased. "The Suffolk Gentleman's Memorandum Book" for 1788 shows over sixty places in that county alone which boasted annual Fairs. Some of these, as at Bungay, lasted two days. An advertisement of 1759 in "The Ipswich Journal" gives a glimpse of the trade at this Fair —

"Wm. Dammant intends to keep Bungay Fair next Monday and Tuesday, with all sorts of Kitchen Furniture made of hammered iron — Cauldrons, Kettles, Boilers, Saucepans, Frying-Pans, Stew-Pans.

N.B. Orders from all Parts of England, for any of the Iron Goods, will be carefully executed by the said William Dammant."

In the 1780's, the advertisement for Sudbury Fair on September 4–6th specified "buying and selling of Butter, Cheese, Hops, Toys, Horses, Sheep and other Cattle, free from all tolls and tollage except the common Market fee, which will be demanded on Saturdays only."

"The Village Curate" gives a lively picture of a typical country fair towards the end of the century. The "doctor" on a platform sells salve for corns, worm-cake and pills and shows his kettle, silver knives and forks, ladle and cream-pot and splendid tankard. There are stalls for gingerbread and beer, and amusements of all sorts for children —

> "For little master's pence, a coach, a drum,
> A horse, a wife, a trumpet; dolls for miss,
> Fans, cups and saucers, kettles, maids and churns;
> For idle schoolboys Punchinello rants,
> The juggler shuffles and the artful dame
> Extends her lucky bag."

There are games for the young — throwing the horseshoe, bowling at nine-pins, till excitement leads them on to "Rant, rave and swear, cudgel, get drunk and fight;

Then comes the ass race."

The importance of Beccles as a trading centre is indicated by its having three annual Fairs, in May, late June and October. The last was principally for the sale of horses. An incident of 1787 shows that sharp practice might be expected —

"Whereas I, Charles Turner, of the City of Norwich, Horse-dealer, did at Beccles Fair obtain a Horse from Thomas Meyer, servant to Mr. Samuel Robinson, of Geldeston Staithe, the Property of his said Master, under false Pretences, for which offence he has justly proceeded against me: but thus acknowledging myself as aforesaid, and paying for the said Horse according to the bargain made, and all Expenses attending the Recovery of his Property occasioned by me, he has humanely stopped further Proceedings: for which Lenity I return my sincere Thanks and promise never to be guilty of the like in future: As witness my Hand this 20th day of July 1787.

Charles Turner
His X mark."

Fairs were also an occasion for moral licence. Silas Nevill wrote in his diary in 1771 "in the afternoon was persuaded to go to Gorleston Fair, much frequented by low people, particularly the more profligate." And Agnes Strickland includes a gloomy picture of a Fair in "Barak Johnson and the Blind Witness", a story set in the neighbourhood of Southwold and Beccles —

"The clocks were striking four in the morning when they entered Scrapeton, which presented a revolting picture of the demoralising effect of fairs on the lower classes of society . . . the tawdry over-dressed

groups presented pale and haggard countenances . . . some were leaning their aching heads over tables still covered with the unseemly remnants of their late feast. Others had fallen asleep in chairs, or even on the ground; while a few, with whom the maddening passion of gambling prevailed over the weakness of the flesh, continued to play at cards, and to bet on the games with as much vehemence as if it were the only business on earth."

Agnes Strickland brought a mid-Victorian outlook to these recollected scenes of her Suffolk childhood; but there can be no doubt that when the business of the Fair was over — or indeed, whilst it proceeded — cheerfulness and pleasure culminated in drunkenness and

"the muddy ecstasies of beer"

as Crabbe expressed it in "Inebriety", the first poem displaying his mordant wit.

But Fairs came to Becclesians only thrice a year. The river provided a constant source of pleasure. There was fishing and bathing. Isaac Blowers liked to bathe in the river early in the morning. He also bathed at Lowestoft. The popularity of sea-bathing was greatly increasing towards the end of the century. Bathing-machines were available at Yarmouth and Lowestoft by the 1780's and later at Southwold. That women as well as men soon used these machines is shown in an amusing incident at Yarmouth in 1802 — "a whimsical circumstance occurred last week. A Bathing machine, owing to the slope of the beach, descended too far into the sea. There were two Ladies inside quite in the situation of Eve. The driver was unable to assist them and some Gentlemen who were bathing near the place, attracted by their cries, hastened to their relief. The Gentlemen were of course in a situation as much resembling Adam; but there was no time for ceremony, and the distressed Ladies were very glad to be delivered at the expense of decorum."

Bathing was not confined to the well-to-do. John Howard, in his account of a visit to Yarmouth in 1788, reported, "I also visited a Charity School here. Thirty fine healthy boys and twenty girls. The boys bathe three times a week in the sea during summer. It would also be useful to encourage the children in learning to swim on these occasions."

Blowers also records a pleasant day's sailing with a picnic on the banks of the Waveney. The great event on the river was the Water Frolic, an annual Beccles event which took place in late July or early August. "The Norwich Mercury" reported in 1787: "We hear that Beccles Annual Water Frolic will be on Monday July 30th and that a great deal of company is expected." In 1790 the Frolic was held on Oulton Broad "where much company is expected." Perhaps the wherries started from Beccles and sailed to Oulton. These Frolics resembled other eighteenth century amusements; they were occasions for eating, drinking and noisy high spirits. An amusing account of Yarmouth water frolic in 1777 mentions the loud and prolonged ringing of bells and firing of popguns as the wherries sailed off, the Mayor's leading —

"When lo! from the bridge and the opposite shore
A large fleet of gallies began to unmoor,
While skiffs, yawls and bumboats, in infinite numbers,
All press'd round the Mayor like canoes round Columbus."

Arrived at their destination on Breydon Water, the frolickers turned to the joys of eating —

"How they ripped up the pastries, and scrambled for crust,
Dismembered the turkies, the capons untrussed,
And unbuttoned their waistcoats, for fear they should burst."

Later, invited ladies joined the returning revellers and displayed their charms as the motley armada approached the town, to a concourse of cheering spectators.

Skittles was played in inn yards. The larger inns in market towns often boasted a bowling green; there were Bowling Green Clubs in Beccles and Bungay. Clubs proliferated, their main function to provide an excuse for drinking. Beccles had its Saturday night club, which met at the King's Head. But the important social occasions were the Assemblies. Every town had its Assemblies — three or four at regular intervals — where the elite of the town and the neighbouring gentry met and the aristocracy deigned to preside. There was dancing, conversation and cards. An advertisement of 1789 shows that these gatherings were intended for families in the surrounding district and not simply for those in the town —

"Beccles First Subscription Assembly. New Room. Monday October 5th. Tickets for non-subscribers 5/-; more than five miles 3/6. Supper included."

An Assembly needed a large room. Though the better inns could provide something adequate, many towns preferred to have a building set aside for Assemblies and similar functions. Beccles Assembly Room was built in 1785 and financed by a Tontine Bond, subscribers to which included Sir Thomas Gooch of Benacre and gentry from villages near Beccles, besides residents of the town. Occasionally there were Assemblies for charitable purposes. For several successive years an Assembly was held at Beccles for the benefit of Johnson Collins, the blind organist; and in 1795, that year of great distress, there was an Assembly "for the benefit of the Poor".

The Assembly Room was also used, of course, for dancing classes. The Dancing Master, Mr. Lalliet, who had classes in Yarmouth and Beccles, paid four guineas per annum for the use of the Room, where he held an Annual Ball. In 1797 he advertised thus:

"Mr. Lalliet's Balls: at Yarmouth Tuesday Oct. 17th and at Beccles Thursday Oct. 19th.

At each, after the Pupils' Balls, a Public Ball. He also begs to inform the Public, that he has for the above Evenings engaged at a great expense, the first HARP PERFORMER in the kingdom.

Tickets 3/6 each. Tea, Coffee and Music included."

Beccles and Bungay Book Clubs were flourishing in the 1770's; and there were sizeable private libraries besides that of Robert Sparrow at Worlingham Hall. The scholarly Peter Routh wrote of his pride in the fine show his books made in his new house "reaching to the very

ceiling of the room." The library of John Price, sold at his decease in 1791, comprised 1,400 volumes. Sales by booksellers in Norfolk and Suffolk of up to 4,000 books were not uncommon by the 1780's

Country sports and amusements in Norfolk and Suffolk were varied. Country dancing and flower shows; pea feasts and bean feasts; the smock race and the pig and ass race; cricket with stakes of a guinea a man; the rough sport of camping — all these were features of life in villages and towns. There was boxing, but also opposition to it. Peter Routh mentions with approval the prevention of a boxing match on Beccles Common by the local magistrates. In the 1760's the Clerks of the Peace for Norwich and Norfolk had orders to prosecute anyone organising a Boxing Match; and a letter in the "Norfolk Chronicle" strongly supported these orders: "For persons to agree in a deliberate manner to fight each other for the sake of gain, and to abuse that strength which God has given them, is, I think, of all actions the most odious and detestable." This letter strikes a surprising note in the rough mid-century. For if, on the one hand, there was a desire, felt in the provinces as well as in London, for greater refinement in the pleasures of the well-to-do and educated, there remained a zest for noisy jollification whenever an opportunity could be found for it — as on that occasion in 1771 mentioned in the chapter "A Celebration" when the news of the exculpation of Matthew Schutz was received: bells were rung, guns fired — "the cheerful night concluded with fire-works, illuminations and every demonstration of joy that could be exhibited." The taverns were busy.

Then there were occasional amusements like this one in May 1799, "On Thursday se'nnight a match was made between two gentlemen at Yarmouth for twenty guineas a side, which could trot his horse the greatest distance in one hour. They started at Haddiscoe, rode through the town of Beccles on to the Yoxford road and completed 14 miles in 51 minutes, when the horse which had been behind all the way, now passed the other with so much ease, that the rider jeeringly bade his opponent good day, which so disheartened him, that he gave up the match. Ten to one was laid on the favourite horse which led all the way. The winning horse had lately been bought for only £8." Here was matter for talk in the taverns.

CHAPTER XV

The Swing of the Moral Pendulum

The Bohuns of Beccles were descended from Humphrey de Bohun, cousin of William the Conqueror, with whom he came to England in 1066. The chequered history of this ancient family ended with the death of William Bohun gent. at Beccles in 1780. After his decease,

however, his half-brother, Le Grice Browne, assumed the name of Bohun by royal license; and for two further generations the Bohuns remained among the prominent families of the town.

William Bohun's father, born in 1681, was an interesting example of a man of wealth and ancient family who became a surgeon and practised as such in Beccles. His wife Prudence had married, as her first husband, John Browne of Beccles, by whom she had one son, Le Grice Browne, born in 1731. She married William Bohun M.D. not long after the death of John Browne, and by her second marriage had a son, William, and a daughter, Prudence.

This chapter is concerned with two generations of Bohuns; that of William Bohun and Le Grice Browne, born respectively in 1735 and 1731, and that of George William Browne Bohun, son of Le Grice Browne, born in 1767. The contrast between the two generations shows the swing of the moral pendulum — the mid-eighteenth century pleasure-loving, extravagant, cynical; the next generation serious and devout. This contrast within one family illustrates a general change in English life, the change of manners and outlook seen clearly when the novels of Smollett and Jane Austen are compared. In the England of Jane Austen there remained much of what Smollett's sharp and cynical eye had observed and recorded with relish; but the influence of Wesley and the Evangelical Movement had strengthened a growing and wholesome reaction against moral laxity. Smollett himself shows something of this change, for his last novel, "Humphrey Clinker" (1770) is far less coarse than his first, "Roderick Random" (1748).

Smollett describes thus how his hero, Roderick Random, is given money by the apothecary to whom he is apprenticed, to try his luck in London. "A small accident which happened about this time determined him in my favour. This was no other than the pregnancy of his maid-servant, who declared her situation to me, assuring me at the same time that I was the occasion of it. Although I had no reason to question the truth of this imputation, I was not ignorant of the familiarities which had passed between her master and her; taking advantage of which I represented to her the folly of laying the burden at my door, when she might dispose of it to much better purpose with Mr. Crab. She listened to my advice, and next day acquainted him with the pretended success of their mutual endeavours. He was far from being overjoyed at this proof of his vigour . . ." Crab, having failed to persuade the girl to procure an abortion, decides to do what Roderick hoped he would — he offers the apprentice money to leave, so that he can later ascribe the maid's pregnancy to the departed young man. This incident, so typical of Smollett's subject matter, is typical also of many mid-eighteenth century novels. Johnston's "Chrystal, or the Adventures of a Guinea" (1760) provides another example. This popular novel describes how the guinea passes through many hands in a series of incidents of fraud, crime, sensuality and prostitution. More familar examples of cynicism and laxity are Lord Chesterfield's Letters with their advice to his son on the seduction of women, Wilkes' "Essay on Woman" and the notorious "Fanny Hill". Sir John Fielding in his Charge to the Grand Jury at the Quarter Sessions Westminster

in 1773 spoke of "one public offence, so alarming in its nature and so mischievous in its effect . . . selling indecent and obscene prints and books."

Two East Anglian examples suggest that this literature did not much exaggerate the features of the society it depicted. A paragraph in "The Norfolk Chronicle" gave this obituary: "One Jewill, a gamekeeper of Woodhall, cut his throat the day he was discharged by his master. He left a wife and seven small children . . . and what is more remarkable, he had had by 19 women 19 children, and another woman is with child by him and very near her time." The sordid story of unbridled sensuality was recorded without moral comment. This was in 1774. A picture of rural life in Suffolk some years later, in Rev. John Crabbe's biography of George Crabbe, includes this description of a frequent evening visitor to the home of Mr. Tovell of Parham, an uncle of the poet's wife — "A relative of the family, a wealthy yeoman, middle-aged, thin and muscular, he was a bachelor, and famed for his indiscriminate attachment to all who bore the name of woman — young or aged, clean or dirty, a lady or a gipsy, it mattered not to him; all were equally admired. He had peopled the village green; and it was remarked that, whoever was the mother, the children might be recognised in an instant to belong to him. Such was the strength of his constitution, that, though he seldom went to bed sober, he retained a clear eye and stentorian voice to his eightieth year, and coursed when he was ninety. He sometimes rendered the colloquies over the bowl peculiarly piquant."

William Bohun grew up in this England of the third quarter of the eighteenth century. The only son and heir of his father, who died in 1743 when the boy was only eight, he went to Cambridge, took his degree and entered upon a life of fashionable pleasure. We find him writing to his sister about 1760 from an Inn — "The constant hurry I have been in since I arrived at York, with the continued round of what are called diversions made it impossible for me to write to you or to any one. Even now I am set down in a crowded room where nothing is heard but 'six to four' or 'two to one' ". He had travelled with friends, via Bury, Stamford and Grantham, staying for a few days at Sir Thomas Tancred's house near Ripon before going on to York for the races "which by the list I have enclosed in this letter you will easily believe to be the most brilliant and most crowded of any diversions of this sort in England." He proceeds to give an account of a favourite eighteenth century social occasion — "The Assembly here on Wednesday equalled any one I almost ever saw, and except on Tuesday they have all been remarkable good ones. The opening of an Assembly by four Minuets in the different parts of so spacious a room as this, has a very fine effect. It was opened the first night by the Duke of Devonshire and Lady Carlisle — Marquis of Rockingham and Lady Louisa Gower — Earl of Carlisle and Lady Fitzwilliam — Earl Fitzwilliam and Lady Bellasyse. For an account of the company you must consult the list enclosed and for an account of the sport you will give my brother the other list which will thoroughly satisfy him: though you may tell him that I never saw any horse equal to Eclipse, and that it is generally believed he would have left the other two horses one mile out of four,

if he had been allowed to go on with the same speed he set out. Apropos of Eclipse. The owner of him — one O'Relly, better known among gamblers and pickpockets than by the gent. of the turf, has been guilty of a very heinous offence since he came to this Town, and has never dared show his face but once, and then he was kicked out of a coffee house. The affair was this . . ."

But what it was that the raffish O'Relly had done, Samuel Rix does not permit us to know! There is a gap in Rix's transcription of the letter at this point. The anecdote which young Bohun did not scruple to recount to his younger, unmarried sister was too improper for the mid-Victorian solicitor to include. Even so, this letter gives an excellent picture of a large race meeting: the concourse of the wealthy and fashionable; the unquestioned social priority of the aristocracy; the betting spree; and that other shady world, different but not dissociated, of the O'Rellys. Elegance and boisterous roughness commingled. "The noise in this room is at present so great that I must finish writing — begging you would make my best respects to all friends, and believe me to be, Dear Sister,

Your affectionate Brother,

W. Bohun.

He stayed at York for another fortnight.

But the diversions of England were not enough for this young man of pleasure. He was soon to make the Grand Tour of Europe. It was the fashionable thing to do. The end of the Seven Years War and the Peace of Paris in 1763 was followed by a veritable invasion of the Continent by English travellers. Horace Walpole estimated that 40,000 English travellers passed through Calais between 1763 and 1765; and a visitor to France in the 1780's estimated that there were 30,000 Englishmen there. To the many fashionable societies was added the Macaroni Club, the qualification for whose membership was foreign travel. This club did not escape censure, even in that uncensorious age — "A kind of animal . . . called a Macaroni. It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry, it eats without appetite, it rides without exercise, it wenches without passion" declared the Oxford Magazine in 1770.

In 1766 William Bohun was in Paris with his friend Sir John Blois. He writes to his half-brother Le Grice Browne describing the brilliant scene at Versailles, where he had been invited to witness the presentation of Lady Rochford to the King and Queen — "As this is the finest court in Europe and the finest palace in the world, you may imagine that this was a sight highly worthy the observation of a traveller. We had afterwards a very good dinner, at which several of the first duchesses of this place were present as well as some of the nobility, such as the Duke of Northumberland, Lord Carlisle etc. We were waited upon by gentlemen of the court, with their hats on, and swords by their sides. There were above forty persons at table, and the number of dishes almost infinite.

Dicky, who drank so much Maderia at the Thatched House, is come to Paris on business. A few nights ago we saw a very odd figure at a masquerade in an English great coat, boots and spurs. As he was

masqued we did not at first know him, and thought it was some Frenchman who had put on the part of our country. Upon a nearer inspection however I detected our friend Dicky, who, as the French themselves allowed, acted his part very well, that is, was very awkward and constantly getting his spurs entangled in the domino of some man or the petticoats of some woman. We laughed at him at last so much, without seeming to know him, that he went out of the room, unmasqued and pulled off his great coat, and treated the company with the sight of Dicky such as he was when you saw him at the Thatched House."

He concluded with an urgent request for £100 to be placed at his bankers' in Temple Bar. A year later he was still abroad. He writes to Le Grice Browne — who during this time was quietly domesticating in Beccles — from Italy. He and his companion had been to Geneva, then over the Alps to Turin and on to Rome. This letter begins with another request, and again an urgent one, for a further £100. The life of fashionable pleasure was expensive, and the family finances would seem to have been impaired by William Bohun's lavish expenses. A spectacular opera he had seen at Florence is thus described — "the dresses and scenery were both rich and beautiful, and the Olympic games were introduced upon the stage, the victors in which were afterwards mounted in four cars or chariots, each drawn by horses round the stage, of which animals no less than twenty were parading upon the theatre at the same time."

He and Sir John Blois spent the mornings in Rome in seeing the remains of the ancient city, under the direction of a celebrated antiquary; in the evenings they went to "the conversations of Cardinals, Princes and subtle Romans. This last is a business I am not at all fond of."

A few years later Bohun's friend Chaloner Arcedeckne writes to him from France: "I ever imagined, my dear Bohun, that your affairs had kept you in the Country fully employed, without giving you time for one scratch of the pen to Florence. You have, however, cancelled all former failings by observing the true French decorum in thinking of me the new year. May it be more propitious to you than the old one, and bring fresh vigour and appetite to your decaying Passions . . ." About the time this letter was written there was born a certain Becclesian whom Rix describes as "the reputed son of William Bohun."

Bohun and Arcedeckne seem to have shared intellectual as well as sensual interests. The latter wishes he could find some place to settle in England "where we could talk over old scenes, and agree in the villainy of the Church which wants to tyrannize over men's consciences. Apropos I have in my hands a book which has made a good deal of noise in France. I mean 'Le Système de la Nature' by Mons D'Holbach." There follows a paragraph which shows that the writer was well acquainted with D'Holbach's ideas; and that he could assume Bohun's interest in intellectual matters. They were men of Gibbon's generation.

Another friend of William Bohun was his cousin John Price, who describes thus in a letter of 1774 his amusements in Holland: "The mode of travelling in Holland is perfectly Venetian, and the young

lady and I amused ourselves on board the boats with reading Arisoto. Sometimes indeed we came to passages where we were obliged to skip half a canto, for as Madame Sevigne says, there are in it des endroits scabieux for a young woman. Miss doubted whether my impudence was greater in proposing such a book to her or in reading it in presence of her father. Ma la figlia me perdonara et il buon padre non intendera niente . . ." This was certainly an anecdote to please Bohun. Gay and cultured, extravagant and cynical, the last direct descendant of the ancient family died at Beccles in 1780 at the early age of 45. He had escaped matrimony.

Bohun's half-brother, Le Grice Browne, assumed the name of Bohun in 1787. His second surviving son, George William Browne-Bohun is the man I have taken to typify the swing of the pendulum. William Bohun spent as much of his time as possible away from his native town; George William spent all his life there. The former was a gay bachelor; the latter married and had a family of twelve children. The former had no profession and took no part in local affairs; the latter became an attorney and served the office of Port Reeve in 1793 and 1808.

But the contrast went deeper than this. The elder man was a sceptic; the younger one was deeply religious. He had always been a conscientious Churchman in his younger days; and during the later part of his life he came under the influence of the extreme Calvinist beliefs of the local Baptist minister, George Wright, a man of fierce and uncompromising zeal. During this time, George William Bohun wrote down his beliefs under the heading "Reflections on the Scriptures"

"1. I am bound to believe there is an elect People of God . . .

2. I do not believe in the Doctrine of Reprobation as opposed to that of Election, because it is nowhere distinctly so stated in Scripture, and because I cannot reconcile it to the Mercy of God that he would create man for the sole purpose of Destruction, and also because such a Doctrine is in opposition to the numerous invitations in Scripture to seek God and the promises to those who do seek him that they shall find him.

3. I embrace most cordially the Godhead in Three Persons and that the only way of Salvation is through the atonement made by the second Person in the Godhead under the influence of the third, to the first Person — that salvation is the free gift of God and is not attainable through any merits of our own."

These Reflections, on three sheets of paper, include a long section distinguishing between "general Grace" and "especial Grace"; and the many crossings-out and emendations show a mind earnestly struggling to formulate, as precisely as possible, a doctrine acceptable to a troubled spirit.

Memoirs of George William Bohun's last years were written by his youngest daughter, Hannah Prudence. She was just twenty at the time of the first sad incident — "On Sunday Nov. 1 1830 immediately after service at the Baptist Chapel, while witnessing the baptism of a young woman, my dear father was seized with a violent pain in his head. He became senseless . . ." The affiicted man recovered con-

sciousness after two days. He frequently repeated the Psalm, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills." The influence of the Baptist minister was now seen in conflict with the influences of education, family and environment which had made Bohun a strong Churchman — "If Mr. Wright would call here I should be very glad to see him, but I do not care to send for him, as I should not like to offend the Church clergy, for I am 'Church' and die 'true Church' — but I *love* that set of people." Later, he asked to shake hands with Wright and with Isaac Sloper, the Independent minister, "for I have received benefit from both their chapels." He spoke thus to his daughter: "It is one of the greatest consolations to me *now* to think that, a few years back, you withdrew from the world. I have not much of temporal things to leave you, but I leave you in possession of the *greatest* of gifts — faith in Christ. Return no more to *earthly nonsenses*."

How absurd that final phrase would have seemed to his uncle, William Bohun! How incredible it would have seemed that a Bohun should become at heart a Baptist; and that the rising tide of religious indifference among the well-to-do in his youth should have been succeeded by this extreme otherworldliness!

George William Bohun made a partial recovery from his serious illness and lived, a semi-invalid, another four years. Hannah Prudence ends her long account of these last years, the greater part of which concerns the weeks of illness in 1830 when he expected to die, with this sentence: "After much suffering the last fortnight of his life the Allwise Disposer of society took him to his heavenly abode on the 9th April 1835, aged 67." Though so deeply influenced by her father's gloomy piety, she did not become a Baptist. Other influences prevailed. In the year of Queen Victoria's accession she married an Anglican clergyman.

CHAPTER XVI

Schools

In the eighteenth century many country towns had an endowed school for boys. Beccles boasted two such schools: Sir John Leman's School, generally referred to as the Free School and, after 1770, the Fauconberge School, generally called the Grammar School. These schools catered for different needs, and had quite different curricula.

Sir John Leman, a former Lord Mayor of London, "by his will, dated July 8th, 1631, founded a free school in a pleasant and airy part of the town, for 44 children born in Beccles, two in Ringsfield, and two

in Gillingham. He appointed the Portreeve and twenty-four Chief men of the Corporation of Beccles Fen, to be for ever governors of the said school, and of the master, usher and scholars of the same. For the support of this foundation, he bequeathed certain lands and tenements in the parishes of Beccles, Barsham, Ringsfield and the adjoining villages."

The orders for the school, as laid down by Sir John, remained unchanged in the eighteenth century. They were:

"None to be admitted except he can read English perfectly; and to be eight years of age; to continue four years at school, and no longer.

That a book shall be kept of the time of every of their coming or entering into the school, by the master; who shall receive of the abler parents 12d. of the less able 6d. but of the poor nothing, which the overseers of the school shall judge of.

The overseers shall, once every month, meet at the school to take cognizance of any disorder complained of by the master, usher, or parents, and to judge and redress them.

The master and usher shall pray, every morning and every evening, with their scholars; and cause them to read a chapter in the Bible, morning and evening.

They shall chiefly see that their scholars may frequent church, on the sabbath days, to hear divine service, and God's word preached, from the beginning to the ending; and to that end, shall cause them to sit near them in the church.

They shall oversee their manners, and cause them to come in decent manner, and at convenient hours, to the school: that is to say, at 7 o'clock in the morning in summer, and at 8 in winter.

They shall employ them in reading, writing, casting of accompts, and ciphering.

They shall continue until 11 o'clock in the morning, and until 4 in the evening in winter, and until 5 in the summer.

They shall not be absent in harvest, or otherwise, without the allowance of the master and overseers of the school, for the time being.

If any parent shall with-hold his child from school, upon his own private motion, or for any grudge, without the privity of the master and overseers, he shall be deprived of the benefit of the school for the time to come.

They shall return home quietly and reverently, not making clamours in the streets, nor passing by their elders, superiors, and betters, without due and mannerly salutations.

The overseers shall, once in every year, at a time agreed upon by themselves, see how the children profit in those things which the founder principally intended; as also in the ground of religion, according to the Constitution of the Church of England."

The accounts of the school survive from its earliest years. It is remarkable how little the salaries of the Master and the Usher had changed during the century. They were almost the same in 1660 as in 1700, when the Usher was paid £19 and the Master £27.3.1, and in 1765

James Smith, usher £19
Robert Davey, master £34.6.7

But in the 1770's a great change began, for the Master's salary increased enormously — though with many fluctations. This change had nothing to do with the value set upon the Master's services; it was due simply to the method of payment. The Usher was paid a fixed salary; the expenses of the school were met from its current income; and the balance of that income was paid to the Master. When the income derived from the school's property increased, so did the salary of the Master. The following figures of the Master's income show the extraordinary increase, and the considerable fluctuations.

1770	£34. 7. 1	1805	£55. 8. 9
1772	£65.12. 7	1808	£62.12. 0
1775–78	£62.18. 8	1810	£89. 2. 1
1784	£54.17. 5	1811	£147.11.11
1794	£50. 5. 2	1812	£96. 5.11
1795	£75.15. 6	1813	£161.19. 8
1799	£62. 8. 1	1814	£219.19. 5
1801	£86.17.10	1815	£254.18. 4

In the years of agricultural depression which followed the end of war, the Master's salary declined.

Robert Davey did not live to enjoy the full benefit of the increase. He had been appointed in 1761 and he held the Mastership until his death in 1797. Few schoolmasters, even in that age of copious epitaphs, achieved the distinction of a large memorial tablet in the parish church. Davey did so. He was evidently a conscientious and successful schoolmaster. Moreover, he was for many years an active member of the Corporation, serving often as an auditor and several times as one of the surveyors. He carried out for the Corporation a survey of its land. At this time, when commercial education was developing rapidly, schoolmasters were in demand to undertake the extensive surveying required by enclosures. An advertisement towards the end of the century indicated this: "Schoolmaster wanted for the Free School at Dunwich . . . about £25 per annum . . .. If a land surveyor it will be of benefit."

Davey had a hobby — a fashionable one. He painted. In August 1786 he held an exhibition of his paintings in oil at the Ship Tavern, Yarmouth. It was open for five days. A handbill advertising the exhibition shows that the school-master was extremely proud of his work and was not at all backward in praising himself —

"Mr. Davey humbly begs Leave to inform the Nobility and Gentry of Yarmouth and its Vicinity, that the Variety of Paintings which compose his Exhibition are the production of his own Pencil and Genius; And that for ten years past, he has devoted all his leisure hours to this beautiful and entertaining Art, without the least Assistance, either in Drawing, Designing, Perspective or Colouring. To Nature alone, he feels himself indebted for his Knowledge . . . he flatters himself his Paintings possess a particular Share of Merit, from the Claim which they justly have to Variety, Singularity, Novelty and originality: And he doubts not but the Eye of Candour will see them in

a Point of View greatly superior to any partial Description, when he asserts, that his only Times for Study and Practice have been early in the Summer Mornings, before School was opened — in the Evenings, after discharging the Duties of his Profession, and on the usual Holidays when frequently eighteen Hours in the Day have been devoted to this divine Study. Mr. D— was thirty-four years of age before he made his first Attempts in Painting. Therefore, lest the Venom of a captious critic should be spit upon his Works, or any malignant Insinuations busy in his Censure; he respectfully begs Leave to subjoin this Conclusion:— That, under the above recited Circumstances and Difficulties, he Challenges the Productions of any modern Pencil in this, or any other Kingdom."

This remarkable specimen of trumpet-blowing did not procure artistic fame for Robert Davey. On the back of his copy of the handbill, Isaac Blowers wrote: "Alas, poor Bob."

When Davey died in 1797, a significant change was made. The Master was to be allowed to take boarders at the school, the number not to exceed twenty. Such a radical change would not have been sanctioned unless demand had been strong.

The new Headmaster, William Burrows, used the privilege granted by the Corporation and attempted to change the character of the school. In 1806 he advertised as follows: Board and English Education 25 guineas per annum. Entrance one guinea. Latin and Greek by Rev. L. Girdlestone, 5 guineas per annum. Drawing, Dancing and French by eminent Masters 4 guineas per annum and half a guinea entrance."

It is interesting to note that Rev. Girdlestone, Headmaster of the other endowed school, was to teach classics. At the same time Burrows was engaged to teach Writing and Arithmetic at one of the girls' schools in Beccles. Schoolmasters could add considerably to their income in this way. And as the income of Burrows' post at the Leman school greatly increased during the final years of the war, he must have feathered a useful nest. There were leaner years to follow.

Goldsmith had written sarcastically in 1759 "Is any man unfit for any of the professions, he finds his last resource in setting up school. Do any become bankrupts in trade, they still set up a boarding school, and drive a trade this way, when all others fail." And he added, in more serious vein, "Every member of society should be paid in proportion as he is necessary; and I will be bold enough to say, that school-masters in a state are more necessary than clergymen, as children stand in much more need of instruction than their parents." This was not the general view, but it showed the way opinion was moving; and Burrows was one of the beneficiaries.

The other endowed school, the Fauconberge, which commenced in 1770, was intended principally for the preparation of boys for the University. Dr. Henry Fauconberge had, at his death in 1713, bequeathed lands in Corton to provide interest for certain legatees; and on the death of the last of these the interest was to be used "to make a provision for learning and instruction of youth in the said town of Beccles." The first Headmaster was Rev. Peter Routh, who held the post until 1794, when he was succeeded by the amiable and eccentric

Rev. John Lang Girdlestone. Like several other Suffolk clergymen, Girdlestone was both scholar and author. Such accomplishments carried financial advantages and he was able to charge 100 guineas per annum to private pupils for board and tuition. He published a translation of the Odes of Pindar in 1811 (to which was prefixed an ode in honour of Nelson) and after his removal to a comfortable living at Sheringham he published "Amusements of a Recluse." Girdlestone was rarely seen except clad in a short spencer, worn through all kinds of weather, and with a walking cane which was never known to touch the ground! He had "a natural warmth of temper . . . some severity in the use of corporal punishment," says S. W. Rix. In this he followed the custom of the times. His contemporary, the sometime Headmaster of Norwich Grammar School, Dr. Parr, remarked on hearing that a certain pupil had begun to show great promise — "Then let the flogging begin"! But there were compensations for his pupils in Girdlestone's fondness for skating; they escaped many a hard lesson by reporting to him at the breakfast table the discovery of a level of peculiarly good ice. The word was usually given to prepare the skates and shut up the books

"Ah, swifter than ourselves the day
Of short-lived pleasure fleets away!"

wrote Girdlestone in his "Amusements of a Recluse".

Besides these two endowed schools, there was a private school which had been conducted by Rev. John Lodington (nephew of the then Rector of Beccles, Rev. Thomas Page) until Peter Routh took it over; and when Routh succeeded to the Fauconberge headship, the private school was continued. It was a boarding and day school. In 1795, under Charles Brightly, there were some twenty boarders; and it was during Brightly's tenure that Chateaubriand taught at this school. An interesting point here is that two Anglican clergymen were followed by a dissenting layman.

There may well have been other small establishments, or small groups of boys boarded and tutored by clergymen resident in the town. For instance, in 1806 Rev. Robert Leman Page, after a few years as Headmaster of Bungay Grammar School, bought a house in Bridge Street, Beccles, where he took a few pupils, including John Barber Scott, son of a wealthy Bungay merchant. £105 per annum was paid for Scott's board, lodging, tuition and extras. This may seem a very expensive education, but perhaps the extras were large. ("I have bought a new white waistcoat, and Yeames is lending me silk stockings for the Portreeve's Feast and Miss Elmy's party on Saturday," wrote Scott in his diary).

The ample provision for the education of boys in Beccles (other than those of the poor) was matched by that for girls. The second half of the eighteenth century saw a remarkable increase in the number of boarding schools for girls. There was a strong demand for the refined accomplishments — for music, dancing, drawing and needlework. Darcy in "Pride and Prejudice" expected all these, with the addition of "a thorough knowledge of the modern languages and something more substantial in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading".

Many contemporary writers disapproved of the new tendency —

"The farmers' daughters formerly were learnt to
card and spin,
And, by their own industry, good husbands did
they win;
But now the card and spinning-wheel are forced
to take their chance,
While they're hopped off to a boarding-school to
learn to sing and dance."

Criticism was not of the refinements as such, but of the demand for them by families which had previously done very well without them. "This frenzy of accomplishments," said Hannah More, "is no longer restricted within the usual limits of rank and fortune; the middle orders have caught the contagion." Another writer spoke of the boarding-schools as "apt to taint the infant mind, to point the way to fashionable folly." Josephine Kamm's study of girls' education, "Hope Deferred", shows how varied these schools were. Some of them were badly conducted. But the most striking fact is the strength of the educational demand and the establishment of new schools.

"A boarding School for Young Ladies to be opened by Mr. Fairborne Cropley and his daughter at King's Lynn.

Boarding and Needlework	£14.14
English Writing and Arithmetic	2. 2
French	2. 2
Dancing	4. 4
Music	4. 4 etc."

Such is a typical advertisement for one of the establishments opened in 1773. A Miss Cropley set up a school in Beccles in 1779.

There were girls' boarding schools in Bungay and Beccles at this time. In Bungay, there was Mrs. Brunton's School for Young Ladies — "Reading and all kinds of Needlework £10 per annum, half a guinea entrance. If Young Ladies are to be taught Writing and Accompts, Mr. Harvey's school is very near." Mrs. O'Brien's Boarding School at Beccles was advertised in the "Norwich Mercury" in January 1774 —

"The Terms for Board, teaching English grammatically and various sorts of Needlework, are sixteen Guineas a year and two guineas Entrance. If a more enlarged Education be required, Mrs. O'Brien teaches French and Geography on most reasonable terms. She also teaches Tambour, Embroidery and many fancied Works.

Mr. O'Brien teaches Dancing three times a week. The other Accomplishments of Music, Writing and Arithmetic by proper Masters on the usual terms."

Thus both market towns had a typical girls' boarding school, the one at Beccles offering a good deal more at considerably higher fees; and the life led by the pupils at both schools would be like that described by Crabbe in his account of a girls' school in "The Borough" —

"the tasks successive masters brought,
The French they conn'd, the curious works they wrought;
The hours they made their taper fingers strike,
Note after note, all dull to them alike:
Their drawings, dancings on appointed days,

Playing with globes and getting parts of plays;
The tender friendships made twixt heart and heart,
When the dear friends had nothing to impart . . ." —

These were the usual occupations of a day concluding with evening prayer and early retirement, varied in summer with sedate walks.

The O'Briens' school prospered. Though advertisements for schools were common in local newspapers, accounts of their dramatic activities were rare. But "The Norwich Mercury" gave the account in October 1774 —

"On Saturday evening last was performed by the young Ladies of Mrs. O'Brien's school at their Ball Room in this town, which was purposely fitted up for the occasion, a moral, pastoral Drama, entitled A Search after Happiness — The Purity of Sentiment, together with the Simplicity of Stile and Harmony of Versification, which the little Piece contains, were it seems so happily adapted to the Age and Sex of the Performers, as rendered the Representation, which was perfectly correct, a very agreeable Entertainment to a genteel Audience, composed principally of the Parents and Guardians of the young Ladies under Mrs. O'Brien's care."

This Drama was one of Hannah More's youthful effusions — a work of impeccable morality and excruciating dullness. The Preface has an interesting reference to play-acting in girls' schools at this time: "The object of the following poem was an earnest wish to furnish a substitute for the very improper custom, which then prevailed, of allowing plays, and those not always of the purest kind, to be acted by young ladies in boarding schools." There are nine characters in the play. "Four Young Ladies of Distinction" are first introduced —

"Where midnight vices their fell orgies keep,
And guilty revels scare the phantom sleep;
Where dissipation wears the name of bliss:
From these we fly in search of happiness."

They find happiness, of course, in a simple, rural, pious life, after meeting some shepherdesses. There are several songs in the play, but no action whatever. Its many long speeches must have required considerable efforts by Mrs. O'Brien's pupils.

Two years later the school premises were extended by the building of a new school room sixty feet long "with Bed Chambers over the same, which renders the house compleatly adapted as a Boarding School."

In 1780 Mrs. O'Brien retired and her principal assistant, Mrs. Berry, took over the school on the same terms and with the same curriculum. It was announced that "Mr. O'Brien continues to teach dancing there and will pay his usual Attendance to the Schools in Bungay."

In the same year another girls' school was opened in Beccles:

"A. S. Alderton having opened a Boarding and Day School at Beccles in Suffolk presents her respectful Compliments to the Ladies and Gentlemen in Beccles and its Environs, and likewise to her friends in Ipswich and Yarmouth and begs leave to acquaint them and the Public in general that her House (situated between the Church and

Market-Place) is ready for the reception of Boarders and Day-Scholars. Her Terms are: Parlour Boarders 21 1. per annum, Entrance two guineas, Boarders 14 guineas and one guinea Entrance, Tea, Sugar and Washing excepted: to bring with them half a dozen breakfast napkins. The strictest attention will be paid to the Morals of those Pupils committed to her Care, and to every Part of their Education.

Tambour, Dresden, Dearning, Plain Work etc at Eight Shillings a Quarter. Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and the Italian method of Book-keeping taught by A. S. Alderton from Half-past Eleven in the morning until one o'clock, during which time all sorts of School and Blank Books, Pens, Ink, Paper, Sealing Wax etc. may be had.

Music and Dancing by proper Masters."

It is interesting to note that stationery was sold at this school as a side-line. The number of schools was increasing rapidly; already there was wholesale business in supplying them. In "The New and Complete English Letter-Writer" (1780) by Rev. George Browne, is a note — "Good allowance is made to such School-masters etc. as purchase Quantities for the use of their Academies, or for giving away as Presents; as also to those who buy Quantities for Exportation etc." No doubt Miss Alderton bought her supplies wholesale and sold retail.

Among the specimen letters in Rev. Browne's book is one from the teacher in a girls' school to her father, complaining of overwork. There are 46 girls at the school, and only two teachers; and as the other teacher knows no French grammar the writer of the letter has to teach it to all the girls. She asks her father to find her another post.

The life of teachers at boarding schools and of the governess in a family has evoked much sympathy as a kind of genteel slavery. A rather different aspect of teaching girls is seen in the case of Mary, daughter of Rev. Peter Routh. The Rector of Beccles, with a large family to provide for, decided to have his daughter trained for teaching, and then to set up a school for her. He wrote to Martin Routh in 1773 when Mary was 15, "We have just agreed with Mrs. O'Brien to take Polly for five years to accomplish her as a tutress for young Ladies or if so happens a Governess. We are to give thirty guineas down and as much when the time is half expired." Thus Mary Routh learned to be a teacher at the O'Brien's school in Beccles; and eventually she and another sister set up a school, where their father visited them, reporting to Martin "I found your sisters at Norwich commodiously and very pleasantly situated with twelve boarders to begin with."

Another of this very academic family, Sarah, established a school in 1797: "At Worlingham Parsonage a Boarding School is opened by Miss S. Routh for the reception of Young Ladies to twelve years of age. The house is pleasantly situated on a fine dry site and extremely calculated for their accommodation." At what a tender age girls were sent to Boarding Schools in the late eighteenth century! Jane Austen was only six when she left home for a boarding school with her sister Cassandra. It must have been at schools like Sarah Routh's that the new education aids were found most useful. As in the 1770's the number of schools for boys and girls rapidly increased, so did the provision of educational pastimes — jig-saw puzzles such as "A

General Map of America divided into North and South and West Indies with the Newest Discoveries" (1772); sets of cards, such as "Pantheon or Heathen Mythology" (c. 1770); and games like "Bowles's European Geographical Amusement, or Game of Geography, designed from the Grand Tour of Europe by Dr. Nugent." (1795).

It is difficult to trace the duration of these girls' schools. Once established, they had little need to advertise. How long the schools of the O'Briens and of A. S. Alderton lasted, I have not been able to discover. In 1811, however, a new girls' school was established in Beccles by a Mrs. Nicholson, who may have been the wife of one of the dancing masters operating in the neighbourhood. Her charges and curriculum show some changes from those of the previous schools —

Terms (exclusive of Masters) Boarders: 40 guineas per annum, Two guineas entrance. Day Scholars: 12 guineas and one guinea.

French and Italian — Mr. Bardelin (a French emigré)
Writing and Arithmetic — Mr. Burrows (of the Leman School)
Music — Mr. Pymar (organist of Beccles Church)
Drawing — Mr. Crome (the Norwich painter?)
Dancing — Messrs. Noverre and Nicholson.

This shows a shift from needlework and similar crafts to a more ambitiously academic curriculum.

But what happened to the children of the poor — of those who could spare no money for education? Did they receive no education at all? It appears that even domestic servants, toward the end of the century, might be expected to have a smattering of education. An advertisement of 1777 reads: "A creditable Servant wanted for a small family in Norwich. She must read and write tolerably, know how to go to Market, get up small Linen, cook plain Victuals, do the Business of the house, occasionally use her Needle and be perfectly clean. Wages £5 a year." But it is not until long after this that there is evidence of an organised appeal to educate the poor in Beccles. The second Annual Report of the General Committee of the Suffolk Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Church of England (1813) gives details of the Society's income, expenditure and schools —

Donations and subscriptions, with balance from previous year: £1686. Disbursed: £1168.

Ipswich — 272 children
Bury — 233 children
Beccles — 120 children

(All the other schools were considerably smaller).
Reading and writing were taught, with needlework and knitting for the girls. Children attended some schools daily, some two or three times a week, and others once a week. One day in each week was devoted entirely to catechistical instruction.

There was one man at least in Beccles who felt that the need to educate the poor was urgent. This was Rev. William Ainger, Curate of Beccles from 1811–13. He was highly esteemed by the parishioners, who gave him "an elegant assortment of plate." Ainger's "Farewell Discourse, delivered in the Parish Church of Beccles on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 19, 1813" strongly recommended "the support of an institu-

tion for educating the Children of the lower classes in moral and pious habits and in conformity with the Religion of their Country."

There had been excellent education in Beccles for those who could afford it — and for those boys bright enough to secure admission to the Free School — in the latter part of the eighteenth century. But not until the early nineteenth century was provision made for the poor, through the influence of Evangelical piety.

CHAPTER XVII

The House of Industry

"May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY,
Make him a captive!"

Such was Wordsworth's wish for his "Old Cumberland Beggar." A full and moving account of such a House of Industry is given in Crabbe's chapter on "The Poor and their Dwellings" in "The Borough" (1810). The passage is too long to quote in full, as it runs to over 120 lines. It is an indictment of the institution, all the more convincing because Crabbe allows for some advantages over the system of outdoor relief and acknowledges worthy motives in its sponsors —

"Be it agreed — the poor who hither come
Partake of plenty, seldom found at home;
That airy rooms and decent beds are meant
To give the poor by day, by night, content;
That none are frightened once admitted here,
By the stern looks of lordly overseer;
Grant that the guardians of the place attend,
And ready ear to each petition lend,
That they desire the grieving poor to show
What ills they feel, what partial acts they know.
Not without promise, nay desire to heal
Each wrong they suffer and each woe they feel.
Alas! their sorrows in their bosoms dwell . . ."

He goes on to speak of how removal to a House of Industry deprived the poor of those human comforts which mitigated the miseries of poverty — families were parted; grandparents deprived of the sight of grandchildren; widows taken from the lowly homes of a life-time; old friendships broken; loneliness felt in a large company of strangers; the proudly respectable forced to bear the mixing with those whom poverty had degraded. No gossip, no news, broke the dreary monotony.

When Crabbe wrote his account, Houses of Industry had been long established in Suffolk. As early as 1764, the first meetings of the Guardians of the Poor in the Hundred of Wangford (of which Beccles and Bungay were the chief towns) incorporated by Act of Parliament the same year, was held to consider the building of such a House. The meeting was held on June 13th at the Three Tuns in Bungay. The principal landowner, Sir Thomas Gooch, was appointed President. There followed the election, by ballot, of Directors of the Poor: seven other principal landowners, all designated "esquires"; nine clergymen; and seven other propertied men, all "gentlemen".

Isaac Blowers was, by ballot, elected Treasurer, to act 'without fee or reward'.

Four meetings were held in the summer, two in Bungay and two in Beccles. Different inns were patronised to spread the custom fairly — for no doubt these gentlemen, including the clergy, needed some good fare to sweeten their labours.

In October, land was purchased from John Farr's estate in Shipmeadow. It was then agreed that notice should be given to inform persons intending to offer Plans and Estimates for a Poor House capable of containing near 300 persons. Advertisements were to be placed in the Ipswich Journal and Norwich Mercury.

Arrangements having been made in December for the provision of 700,000 bricks by Harmer of Beccles. Isaac Blowers, Treasurer, was ordered to give security for £1000 and a surety — for which he proposed his father, Isaac Blowers. The directors agreed.

The following year, in May, Mr. John Redgrave's plan for a House of Industry was approved; but three weeks later Miles Barne, one of the Directors, submitted an alternative and less expensive plan. He thought the building could be erected for £3,000. The directors considered this alternative and decided on a compromise — Barne's plan was to be adopted, but with additions. Four estimates for carrying out the work on the agreed plan were received in September, varying from £4664 to £4060. Redgrave had estimated for £4027. Finally John Harris and William Field, who had submitted the estimate of £4060, agreed to accept £4,000. In the same month, £784 was paid for the purchase of John Farr's land in Shipmeadow and in May the following year, various sums of £100 were borrowed at 4½ per cent.

Five applications for a Governor and Matron, married, were received — one from Debenham, one from Claydon, one from Beccles and two from Bungay. Matthew Spilling of Bungay and his wife were appointed at £30 a year. Any children were to be boarded with them. Spilling was to clothe them and provide schooling; but they were also to work "for the benefit of the House". He was to be allowed perquisites from tradesmen.

The House and offices were insured for £3,000.

Very detailed regulations were made for clothing, which was then ordered for "300 poor persons". This was a principal difference between the House and the parish poorhouse; in the new institution, clothing for all was to be provided.

A Report submitted by Robert Williams stressed that "cordiality

between Beccles and Bungay is absolutely necessary to good management of the House". Accordingly, care was taken to balance the ordering of supplies such as stoves, braziers, coopers' ware, 150 bedsteads, hempen cloth, clothing, bedding, leather breeches and shoes, between the tradesmen of the two towns.

Building a Pest House was put out to John Harris at £328.

A suitably appointed room was set aside for meetings of the Committee at the House.

In September 1767 a "List of Persons qualified to be Guardians of the Poor within the hundred" was available. All rectors and vicars of parishes were included, together with owners of estates rated to the Poor's rates at £30 per annum, and occupiers of £60 or more per annum. From Beccles there were four in the first category — Rev. Peter Routh, the Rector, Rev. J. Lodington, schoolmaster, and two clergymen whose parishes were near the town — seventeen in the second category and three in the third.

Mr. Henry Negus of Bungay was appointed clerk at £25 a year.

"9 *Oct* 1767. *Diet allowed to the Poor in the House*

Breakfast	Dinner	Supper
Sunday. Bread & Cheese or Butter.	Beef & Meal Dumpling.	Bread & Cheese or Butter.
Monday. ,,	Pease broth	,,
Tuesday. ,,	Suet Pudding	,,
Wednesday. ,,	Milk broth & Meal dumpling	,,
Thursday. ,,	Beef & Meal dumpling	,,
Friday ,,	Pease broth	,,
Saturday. Milk broth	Bread & Cheese or Butter	,,

Abraham Gillingwater, constable of Bungay, to be desired to attend at the House on Sundays to prevent disorder from many persons resorting there."

"21 Oct. 1767. A Chaplain to be appointed to do the occasional duties of visiting and administering the sacrament to the sick, baptising the children, and burying the dead in the churchyard."

Rev. Abraham Dawson, Rector of Ringsfield, agreed to perform these duties for £5 a year.

"29 June 1768. The opinion of Edmund Hoskins Esq. (counsellor) 'that the rector of Shipmeadow cannot refuse admitting the paupers in the workhouse to attend divine service on Sundays, or to bury them in his churchyard, on payment of the usual dues.' "

"19 April 1769. Mary Burgess, for profane swearing, disorderly conduct, and refusing to come before the Committee, was ordered to be set in the stocks this day for two hours and not to be allowed any dinner tomorrow."

The system of Poor Relief which the House of Industry superseded was a mixture of indoor and outdoor relief. There had been a Poorhouse in Beccles, the number of inmates varying, in the five years before the change, between less than twenty and more than forty. At the same time, allowances ranging from 6d to 3/- per week were

made to the needy; the number of these was between forty and fifty. The total expenditure on relief varied according to the seasons, but, significantly, it showed a steady rise in those five years. Thus in the first quarter of 1760 the expenditure was £68.4.4½. In the corresponding quarter of 1765 the expenditure was £97.15.7. The rapid increase in the cost of poor relief was a principal reason for the new centralised system.

Moreover, the cost of outdoor relief exceeded that of indoor relief. For instance, in a typical week in 1760, we find the cost of indoor relief as follows:—

3 bushels of wheat and grinding	11. 3
Two stone 7 lbs beef	8. 9
Groceries 3/9, Milk 2/3, Beer 3/-	9. 0
Cheese 30 lbs 5/-, Butter 8 pints 2/2	7. 2
	1.16. 2
less amount received by Inmates' work	9. 0
	£1. 7. 2

There were then 27 Inmates. The week's allowances for outdoor relief amounted to £1.19.3.

The supervision of Poor Relief was entrusted to Overseers who were elected at Vestry meetings. The man chosen had to take the responsibility for one Quarter only; and, having done his stint, he was not called upon again. In the years 1760–65, twenty different men acted as Overseers in Beccles. The distasteful task was thus well spread among the tradesmen — no doctor or attorney was ever called upon. It was unusual for a man chosen as Overseer to be chosen also, at some other time, for the exalted post of Churchwarden. Since the office of Overseer was unpaid, and could not be expected to carry any advantage, the large number of men who were liable to be chosen would be thankful for the relief afforded by the new system.

But the opposition of the poor to Houses of Industry was bitter. At the very time that the Wangford House was being built in 1765 a mob assembled to pull down the newly-erected House at Nacton near Ipswich. The Annual Register described the occurrence: "Several persons riotously assembled . . . carried their boldness to such length that neither the expostulations of the magistrates against the illegality of their design, which they openly avowed, the consequences of the Riot Proclamation Act being read, which was explained to them, nor the appearance of a body of regular horse and foot, called in as part of the posse comitatus, seemed to make the least impression on them. After some time orders were given for eleven Dragoons that were mounted to move round and form in the rear of the rioters, in hopes that seeing the dismounted Dragoons in front and the horse in their rear, they might be induced to disperse without force, and within the time required by the Riot Act; but instead of doing so, the moment the horses stirred, or rather before, they fell upon both horses and men

with such arms as they had — pease-rakes, hedge stakes, cudgels etc, but in five minutes the affair was over. When this happened there might be four or five hundred persons scattered in knots about the heath, but not above an hundred were in the party that attacked the leaders. Many more persons might have been apprehended with ease, but seven were thought enough to make an example of."

Ten years later appeared in the "Norfolk Chronicle" a petition to Sir Edward Astley and Wenham Coke, M.P.'s for Norfolk, from "the little people of the hundreds of Mitford and Launditch" against the erection of a House of Industry. The petition was unavailing, though the local J.P. James Pratt, opposed the idea of a House. A Bill was brought before Parliament. It was argued against the Bill that Houses of Industry "abridged the Poor of their natural liberty and subjected them to great cruelty of government and great abuses." For the Bill it was argued that in a House the poor were better provided for, at a cheaper rate, and that the education of the Infant Poor was well attended to.

Sir H. Harbord opposed the Bill because "the success of the measure depended upon the attendance of gentlemen." He feared that after a time the local gentry would cease to be conscientious guardians — and then abuses would creep in. But the Bill was carried by a large majority; and there soon followed a meeting at the George Inn, Dereham, to ballot for Guardians. "There was a small Mob of Labourers, who chiefly came from Tivetshall, with Clubs in their Hands, and seemed by their Threats as if bent on Mischief, but so much care had been taken by Lord Townshend and the Magistrates to preserve Peace and good order, that the misguided Persons soon dispersed of themselves . . . They called out 'Pratt, Pratt! etc.' with great Noise and Riot, but he was otherwise engaged."

A contemporary account of a Suffolk House of Industry strongly defended its advantages, especially for children, who "are taught to read and given prayer books and bibles — new clothed . . . bound as apprentices for two or three years only (instead of seven) to prevent ill-usage; whereas children came from parish poor-houses clothed in rags, dirt and vermin . . ." The inmates were allowed out to visit relations, and they kept 2d in the 1/- of what their work earned.

Undoubtedly there were advantages in these gloomy institutions — besides the reduction of the poor rates. Nor must we forget the completely undemocratic view of society which prevailed. Mrs. Trimmer, benevolent and earnest advocate of Schools of Industry for the poor, expressed what was an accepted commonplace when she wrote in 1787: "The Creator has ordained to each peculiar duties: to all in superior stations, justice, humanity, condescension and charity: to the poor, honesty, diligence, humility and gratitude." The Guardians of the Wangford Union, who included some of the most prominent citizens of Beccles and its neighbourhood, probably felt that they had conscientiously carried out their "peculiar duties", and had spent much time and thought in doing so.

The poor sensed another motive. When the Rev. Henslow came to the Suffolk village of Hitcham in 1839 he at once set about the task

of educating and elevating the poor of his parish. His son once described this work to another clergyman, Rev. J. Lucy of Hampton Lucy in Warwickshire. Lucy, then over 70, was a hunting parson of the old school; and his reaction was this: "I do not agree with it, for the people must be kept down — kept down with a rod of iron!"

This was the sentiment of a man who remembered from his youth the horrified reactions in England to the Reign of Terror in revolutionary France. The men who established the Houses of Industry in Suffolk had not experienced such a shock. But they did experience much rioting on a small scale. There were some bad harvests in the 1760's; the consequent shortage of food led to sporadic rioting in East Anglian towns. The concentration of paupers in Houses of Industry not situated in towns must have seemed a prudent way of lessening the danger of sudden outbursts of violence.

The able-bodied inmates were certainly kept occupied. In April 1784 appeared this advertisement: "Hemp Cloth. To be sold at the House of Industry, Shipmeadow, on very moderate terms, a large assortment of exceeding good Hemp Cloth for shirting, sheeting etc. Apply to the Governor."

The Directors and Guardians held an Annual Meeting and Quarterly Meetings. They met at one of the principal inns in Beccles and Bungay alternately to consider tenders and allot contracts for the ensuing quarter, the accounts having been previously examined at a meeting at the House itself. Announcements of such meetings varied little from year to year and were as follows:

The Directors and acting Guardians of the Poor within the Hundred of Wangford will hold their General Quarterly Meeting at the King's Head in Beccles on Wednesday, the 30th of March instant, at Eleven O'clock in the Fornoon when and where all Persons willing to supply the said House of Industry till mid-summer next, with Malt ungrounds, Hops, Peas, Oatmeal, good Household Cheese, Grocery Goods, and Shoes (to be delivered at the said House at such times and in such quantities as shall be required) are desired to send their Proposals in Writing, sealed up, with samples of Malt, Hops etc. before one o'clock of the same Day: after which Time none will be accepted."

The paupers who died at Shipmeadow House of Industry were buried in Shipmeadow Churchyard, in spite of an attempt by the Rector to prevent this. But the following incident of 1794 leaves a harsh impression: Thomas Adams, an inmate of Shipmeadow, stabbed himself with a penknife in his body and neck. He died immediately. The Jurors' verdict was "Wilful Murder". Adams was not buried in the churchyard, but beside the highway. A stake was driven through his body.

CHAPTER XVIII

Crime and Punishment

"Beccles. A room on the ground floor, called the ward, a chamber for women, called the upper ward, a day-room with a fireplace, and a dungeon seven steps underground. In the ward is a window to the street which is highly improper, as I have always seen numbers of idle persons crowding about it. No proper separation of the men and women. Only one court. The keeper has a large garden. Salary £11.10.0. Licence for beer (a riotous ale-house). Clauses against spiritous liquors not hung up. Fees 6/8d. Allowance, a twopenny loaf a day (weight July 9, 1782, 20 oz.) Thirty shillings a year for straw. £5 a year for coals. When prisoners work they have half the profit.

1776 Feb. 6 Prisoners 3
1779 April 2 „ 9
1782 July 8 „ 15"

Such was John Howard's first account of Beccles Gaol or Bridewell. The great prison-reformer was one of the most notable and influential men of the later eighteenth century. His zeal promoted the swing of the moral pendulum. His methodical investigations, whose results were set out with admirable clarity in his books, were models for the later enquiries into other aspects of English society.

Eighteenth century gaols had an unenviable reputation for corruption, drunkenness and grossly insanitary conditions. Some were overcrowded, though from Howard's own figures it appears that East Anglian gaols were not.

Howard wanted prisons to be clean and prisoners properly fed and suitably employed. He wanted drinking of beer and spirits reduced to the minimum. He favoured rigid separation of the sexes. He thought goalers should be paid a sufficient salary to prevent their being dependent upon squeezing money out of the prisoners. The conditions at Beccles bridewell were typical of what he disapproved. There was abundant drinking, from which the gaoler had the profit. The sexes mixed freely and could converse with people in the street. The gaoler's salary was small. The prison was too small.

That some of Howard's strictures had been noted is evident in his latest account.

"Beccles. Many new rooms are added (twelve feet by seven) in which are bedsteads, but even these rooms are not clean. A good court, with a pump, is enclosed for men; and a smaller one for women. Spinning wheels and blocks are now provided by the magistrates; prisoners have no part of their earnings. Keeper's salary £35.

No. of prisoners 1787 — 3"

Howard's comments on prisoners in Norfolk and Suffolk at this

time were varied. At Norwich City Bridewell "I found two persons (committed for bastardy) playing at cards and dice in the gaoler's kitchen in the middle of the day. All cards and dice should be strictly prohibited in prisons." He found the Norwich City and County Gaol "very dirty: no proper separation of the sexes." On the other hand, at Wymondham "each man has his own room in which is a bed, and proper bedding. No other liquor than water is permitted except in case of sickness and when recommended by the surgeon. This he attributed to "the unremitting attention of Sir Thomas Beevor."

There were extraordinary differences in payments and in the number of prisoners. At Ipswich County gaol the salary was £200, whilst at Woodbridge it was a mere £17. In the County Gaol at Norwich Castle there were twenty debtors and twenty felons; in Ipswich Town bridewell there were no prisoners at all. Howard's figures also show a decrease in the imposition of the death penalty in the Norfolk circuit of five counties

	Condemned to death	*Executed*	*Transported*
1770	24	7	17
1771	16	5	11
1772	7	—	7

Public interest in crime was strong. Books on crime and criminals abounded and were sold in all towns. At Beccles, Horth the chemist sold such books as "The Trial of Roger Benstead the elder and younger, at Bury" and "The Trial of John and Nathaniel Nichols for the murder of Sarah Nichols." These men were all hanged. A vast crowd attended the hanging of the Nichols at Norwich. Meen of Beccles sold "The Life of Thomas Green, who was executed on Castle Hill, Norwich, on Wednesday April 12th 1775 for a Burglary in a dwelling house at Diss. Containing an Account of the several Robberies he committed, and the different Regiments he enlisted in and deserted from. The whole written by himself and published at his Request." Price 6d.

Perhaps the most popular of all such books was "The Annals of Newgate; or Malefactors Register" by Rev. Mr. Villette, Ordinary of Newgate, and others. The subject matter and the moralising were alike characteristic of an age which believed that public punishment and the maximum publicity were deterrents to crime. The "Annals" were advertised as "Containing a particular and circumstantial account of the Lives, Transactions and Trials of the most notorious Malefactors who have suffered an ignominious Death for their offences, viz. for Parricide, Murder, Treason, Robbery, Burglary, Piracy, Coining, Forgery and Rapes. Calculated to expose the Deformity of Vice, the Infamy and Punishments naturally attending those who deviate from the Paths of Virtue; and intended as a Beacon to warn the rising Generation against the Temptations, Allurements and the Dangers of bad Company... This work will be elegantly printed and comprized in forty numbers (Price Sixpence each Number) making four large Volumes Octavo."

The contemporary belief in deterrence by gruesome spectacle is well illustrated in "The Omnium" by Rev. William Clubbe, Vicar of

Brandeston, Suffolk, which contains an account of a visit to France. As Clubbe sailed down the Thames in a Gravesend boat, he saw "human figures hanging upon gibbets. Having never seen anything of the kind before, these objects fixed my attention, and led me to reflect on the use of exposing such dismal spectacles to the world. Our Captain reasoned upon the subject much better than myself. The crimes, Sir! for which these miserable objects are exposed, are almost peculiar to seamen, viz. piracy and other offences attendant on a sea life. The objects are so situated that almost every sailor, in the commercial line at least, must see them. Now having the same temptations, opportunities, and perhaps inclinations, they easily make the case their own, and it is then that example operates most powerfully. To judge from my own feelings, for one who passes with unthinking indifference, thousands are seriously and sensibly affected by it." Several Beccles names were among the subscribers to this book, including the Rector and Beccles Book Club.

The "dismal spectacle" of a body on a gibbet was common enough in large towns. In the market towns, the hardly less repulsive sight of public whipping frequently followed the Quarter Sessions. Examples of this and other punishments are shown in accounts of Beccles Quarter Sessions —

1761 Two men convicted of "sodomitical practices" both gaoled for three months and "to be set in the Stocks for one hour on the last Thursday of this time."

1764 Elizabeth Thornton being disorderly, idle and refusing to work to be publicly whipped at Lowestoft next Market Day "until bloody". (This severe whipping was frequently ordered.)

1766 Fines of £2 each imposed on five Beccles men for non-appearance when chosen as Jury men.

1771 Martha Mash and Hannah Peake convicted of stealing 13 turkeys and one goose. Mash to be transported to America for seven years. Peake to be publicly whipped on the next market day.

1771 Thomas Newman, for running away with a shirt, waistcoat and a pair of shoes, the property of the guardians of the poor house of Shipmeadow, to be publicly whipped the next market day.

John Poll, charged with bastardy, to enlist for a soldier.

1774 Robt. Thompson and Samuel Wiseman, for feloniously taking, stealing and carrying away two brass chieves(?) the property of William Howard, to be publicly whipped at Lowestoft next Market Day, then to stand committed for ten days, and to be privately whipped and discharged.

Sarah Calver, for feloniously taking etc. three loaves of bread out of the house of John Stratford of Wenhaston, to be publicly whipped and discharged.

The public whipping of women was rather less frequent than that of men. Whipping of female vagrants was abolished in 1791. By far the most frequent petty crime dealt with at Beccles was that of "reeling

false or short yarn." The offenders were invariably women, for it was they who did the spinning. The usual punishment was committal to the bridewell for a month; later, there was the alternative of a fine.

1777 Benjamin Eves, convicted of stealing a hog-pig, was ordered to be publicly whipt the next Market Day and he is also to undergo the like punishment at Halesworth.

1778 Ann Mills of Bungay committed to Beccles jail hard labour for fourteen days and to be publicly whipped the next Market Day for having secreted, purloined and embezzled wool.

Robert Button (alias Allen) convicted of breaking open a box in the house of John Holmes, alehouse-keeper of Bungay, and stealing 17/6 belonging to Henry Bedingfield, Holmes' servant, three years hard labour on the Thames."

It is noticeable that the public whippings were all to be carried out on Market Days, to ensure that as many people as possible from the town and its neighbourhood might witness them.

Cases of petty theft — including the stealing of ducks, turkeys, turnips, clothes and handkerchiefs — were common. Still more common were cases of bastardy. The average number of cases at Quarter Sessions was about six and of these two or three were generally of men brought before the Magistrates for maintenance orders to be made against them. Such cases were sometimes dismissed, as were cases of assault. On one occasion there were only two cases and both charges were dismissed from lack of evidence. Cases of cruelty were rarely brought. But that the poor had sometimes the protection of the law the following case shows —

1785 "At Beccles Quarter Sessions a farmer was convicted of ill-treating a young girl, his parish apprentice, by tying a rope to her leg, drawing her up thereby and whipping her in that state, by which she received considerable injury: he was sentenced to three months imprisonment and to pay a fine of £5.

In February 1787 the following notice appeared in the "Norwich Mercury" — "Sat. evening last Henry Scarle, a waterman at Bungay, was murdered on board a wherry near Wheatacre Burgh Staithe and his body thrown into the river. Two men, William Hawke, late of Beccles, miller, and Thomas Mayhew, late of Bungay, waterman, were on Thursday evening committed to the Castle on strong suspicion. They were apprehended at Botesdale, in Suffolk, by the care and vigilance of the person employed by the gentlemen of the association at Bungay. Another accomplice, Simon Stannard, is in Beccles gaol, who will be removed to the Castle."

The "Bury Post" gave a fuller account, showing the connection of the murder with habitual and probably organised theft on the Waveney between Beccles and Bungay. "The unfortunate deceased belonged to a Corn Lighter, which having been frequently plundered, he suspected Hawke and Mayhew to be the offenders, as they had solicited him to accompany them on a similar expedition, he accordingly watched for and detected them together with Stannard in their illicit traffic, and informed his employer of the circumstances, in return for which they

determined on the most bloody revenge . . . boarding the deceased's Lighter in the night armed with bludgeons, with which they beat out his brains and then threw his body in the river."

Stannard turned King's evidence; Hawke and Mayhew were hanged on Castle Hill, Norwich.

The case shows the activity of the Bungay Association for the prosecution of felons. Such Associations were springing up throughout East Anglia in the late eighteenth century. The Beccles society was started in 1785. "At a meeting of the Inhabitants at the King's Head, Beccles, an Association was entered into for the Purposes of apprehending and prosecuting Felons in the said town and within five miles thereof. Subscriptions to Owen Holmes, grocer." There were similar societies at Harleston, Diss, Dereham, Swaffham and even villages like Benacre and Ilketshall St. Lawrence. Besides these, there were Societies for apprehending horse-stealers. An advertisement in the "Norwich Mercury" of February 1789 reads —

"*Beccles Association for Prosecuting Horse-Stealers.*"

Whereas an Association for the above purpose is found to be of great public benefit, such persons residing within the distance of five miles from Beccles as are desirous of entering into such an Association are requested to meet at the King's Head in Beccles on Thursday 19th of this instant at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, to consider such Rules and Articles for that purpose as shall be then and there produced.

Jeremiah Smith.

The proliferation of Societies for prosecuting felons in general and horse-stealers in particular points to an increase in crime. Poaching was greatly on the increase — or rather, a great deal of land was being enclosed towards the end of the century and men who had previously shot, snared and trapped with impunity now found they were trespassing. The number of game-keepers increased; man-traps were set on numerous estates. The last decade of the century was a bitter time for the poor, especially when the price of food rose sharply.

There was sometimes a hue-and-cry. In March 1805 a man offered a horse for sale outside the Horse and Groom inn at Beccles. He asked eighteen guineas for it, but soon dropped his price to twelve. Suspicion was aroused. The man decamped without the horse. He was chased some three miles across country towards Geldeston. There he induced some wherryman to take him across the Waveney, saying that he was "pursued for a bastard child" — a common enough reason for a poor man to run away. However, the pursuit continued; he was eventually taken in the village of St. Andrews, several miles further on; and from there brought back to Beccles bridewell.

There were gangs of thieves. In January 1790 it was reported that "In Suffolk a gang of villains have been taken up, chiefly farmers' servants who have for a series of years been in the habit of committing depredations . . . stealing corn, pigs and poultry . . . they have barn-doors only half locked, so that they can re-enter them at night."

The few parish constables — Beccles probably had only two — could do little to check theft. Much of it was undetected, despite the various societies.

"On Saturday last the shop of Mr. Donn of Beccles was broke into and robbed of goods to the amount of forty pounds, which the villains carried off undiscovered," it was reported in March 1787. Rev. Peter Routh's letters mention several undetected thefts, including the following: "Ned Blowers last week had 170 guineas in a shot bag taken out of his shop between two and five in the afternoon by somebody, who made his entrance through the Tiles and ceiling of the Chamber over it, and escaped unobserved by any of the neighbours. And the Sunday sennight before a young fellow was knocked down and robbed, before it was very dark, at the first Milestone towards Weston. Another attack is reported to have been made upon a Traveller on Thursday evening last much about the same place." Attacks by highwaymen and footpads were reported almost weekly in the newspapers; for instance in April 1774 "We hear that the boy who carries the mail from Saxmundham to Beccles was this week stopped and robbed by a footpad of one guinea and some silver; who made off undiscovered." The thieves did not always get the better of the encounter: "A post-chaise ... was stopped on Saturday night last, about 11 o'clock between Loddon and Langley, on its return from Beccles, by a footpad, who laid hold of the reins and knocked the driver off his horse by a severe blow on his face; but he recovering struck the footpad with the end of his whip; and, after struggle, by his activity remounted his horse and drove off."

Then there was smuggling. The viciousness of the smuggling gangs appears in this incident of the mid-eighteenth century. At Beccles a gang of smugglers entered a house, pulled a man out of bed, whipped him most barbarously, forced him out of doors, tied him naked upon a horse, and then rode off with him .... He was not heard of again. Men in such gangs were often notorious characters, like William Hooke of Shipdham who escaped from justice in 1789. Hooke was a noted bruiser and wrestler.

Smuggling was on the increase. Lord Sheffield told Arthur Young in 1771, when asking him to introduce the growing of cabbages in Sussex, "All the lively able young men are employed in smuggling. They can have a guinea a week as riders and carriers without any risk; therefore it is not to be expected that they will labour for eight shillings a week until some more effective means are taken to prevent smuggling." At much the same time "The Norfolk Chronicle" reported: "There are at this time a great many desperate smugglers on our coast, the greatest part of whom are fled from Kent, Surrey and Sussex, many of them are supposed to be outlaws." All along the Norfolk-Suffolk coast smugglers were active. Encounters between smugglers and excise men were reported from Hunstanton, Cley, Mundesley, Happisburgh, Yarmouth, Lowestoft, Benacre, Southwold, Sizewell, Dunwich and Aldburgh between 1770 and 1795. Smuggled goods were sometimes seized and later sold at custom-houses. Thus in 1792, 900 gallons of foreign Geneva were sold at Southwold. There were larger sales at Yarmouth. In spite of this, the smugglers prospered and grew in boldness. The surgeon, William Goodwin, recorded in his diary the smugglers carrying their cargoes, landed at Sizewell, through Earl Soham in the broad

light of day without the slightest interference. These formidable gangs sometimes mustered over a hundred men. A mixture of fear and self-interest made the populace tolerant. The wording of this advertisement for a law tract of the 1790's shows the extent of such tolerance —

"Laws relating to Smugglers: or a Pocket Companion For the Custom-House Officer, the Excise Officer, the Smuggler and the Encouragers of Smugglers Containing all the Acts of Parliament now in force with ample instructions for avoiding the severe Punishments and Penalties inflicted by those Laws."

Tolerance did not seem to lessen the violence inseparable from this lucrative trade. In October 1780 "The Norwich Mercury" reported: "Last Sunday se'enight a large gang of Kentish smugglers, to the amount of nearly 100 horses and men, loaded with dry goods, passed through Beccles, Bungay and Harleston. On the Monday they seized Mr. Brock, an excise officer, at a public house in Yaxley, near Eye, and after beating him in a most inhuman manner, set him upon a horse and rode off with him: there is but little doubt of his being murdered. This daring outrage was committed at one o'clock at noon, in sight of many people. A party of light horse in disguise have been searching the country round for some miles but can get no intelligence of him. This man was heard to shriek in a terrible manner through some of the villages as they carried him along."

Smugglers were not often caught though their goods were often impounded. There must have been a great deal of undetected crime in the eighteenth century. Amongst the most numerous cases at Beccles Quarter Sessions were those of larceny dismissed for lack of sufficient evidence. Prisoners sometimes escaped. In 1787 Daniel Whiting of Ipswich, who had been appointed gaoler at Beccles the previous year was dismissed and fined £5 for allowing prisoners to escape! The gaol was enlarged and made more secure in 1806, an event which provoked this squib:

"The Projectors of the New Building now erecting being extremely desirous of filling the rooms, and considering that neither stratagem nor arbitrary measures are likely to accomplish so desirable an end, beg leave to inform the Public of their Intention to let a number of them, at very small rates, as soon as they are finished.

Application to be made to Old Dignity at Mushroom Hall. N.B. Informers, Sycophants, Spies, Eavesdroppers will be allowed to live rent free."

After this change, a corresponding change in punishments occurred: there were fewer public whippings but solitary confinements were imposed instead — a punishment favoured by John Howard and made possible by the enlargement of the gaol.

The prevalence of crime and the harshness of punishment make a gloomy picture. There was a brighter side. Charity to prisoners was widespread. Almost every week the Norwich newspapers recorded gifts of food or money, or both, to prisoners in the city and county gaols (which were generally far from full. In 1797 it was reported: "There are no prisoners in the County gaol.") An example of such charity to the prisoners in Beccles gaol was given by a correspondent

to "The Norwich Mercury" in 1787 — "If bright example fire the generous heart, I know no one more deserving of imitation than our worthy inhabitant, Mr. S. M. Creed. This worthy gentleman (during the inclemency of the season) relieved eleven poor prisoners confined in our gaol; and on New Year's day repeated his humane benevolence by sending them a dinner sufficient for two days. I was present and observed they appeared to have a grateful sense of the obligations they are under to their kind benefactor." The importance to the observer of the prisoners showing due gratitude may seem absurd; but at this time no virtue was more highly regarded than gratitude and none more strongly condemned than ingratitude. "It is a crime of so dark and detestable a nature, that the mind in which it is permitted to inhabit must be totally abandoned by every generous virtue, every noble sentiment," wrote Mrs. Bonhote of Bungay in her "Parental Monitor" (1788). Among the Beccles subscribers to this book were Robert Sparrow, Rev. Bence Sparrow, Isaac Blowers — and Samuel Creed.

CHAPTER XIX

The Impact of the Napoleonic War

The Napoleonic Wars made a far greater impact on Beccles and its environs than the earlier wars of the eighteenth century. The Seven Years War, however, brought its excitement and its troubles. At Beccles Quarter Sessions in 1762 the case of Thomas Daich of Beccles came before the Justices. He had been violently assaulted "and put in Irons" by a Press Gang commanded by a Lieutenant of H.M. Navy, under pretence of his being a seaman. The magistrates expressed great indignation at the arbitrary actions of the Press Gang and thought fit to have a notice inserted in "The Ipswich Journal" — "Whereas divers breaches of the Peace, disturbances and great misdemeanour have been committed by the said Press Gang in Suffolk . . ." all persons injured were enjoined to apply immediately to a Justice of the Peace for protection. The end of the war was then imminent; no further conflict between civil and military authority occurred. The following year troops returned from Europe and on March 5 "The Norwich Gazette" reported "On Saturday last arrived in our roads twenty-two sail of transports with troops from Wilhamstadt. A battalion of the third regiment of foot guards on Thursday last began their march from Yarmouth to London, some by way of Beccles and some by way of Bungay. On Tuesday and Wednesday part of a regiment of Oxford Blues disembarked and this day about fifty of the horse began their

march to Beccles where they are to halt." A fortnight later the Highlanders marched for London. "We hear some of them were disbanded at Beccles and Bungay."

Among those who returned was Cady Hall of Beccles, who had fought at the great victory of Minden in 1759. He was for many years subsequently a Questman at the Parish Church.

Service in the Militia was a constant threat for the able-bodied. An Act of 1761 had fixed the quota of militia men to be raised in each county; and within the county responsibility rested with the parish to provide its share of the quota. At the Vestry meeting in Beccles in 1762 it was unanimously agreed "that the Churchwardens and Overseers should procure such Militia men as shall be wanted for this place for one year to come at the most reasonable price they can be had." This order was re-affirmed in 1765, repealed in 1773, but re-enacted in 1780. In that year and in subsequent years until the end of the American War of Independence the Corporation gave financial help, paying ten guineas for two substitutes in 1780, fifteen guineas for three in 1781, and twenty-five for five in 1782.

The function of the Militia was home defence; they were an investment against invasion. On occasion they were used against rioters, as in the Gordon Riots of 1780. They were also very useful in local action against smugglers. In 1778 a detachment camped at Southwold had actually to fight a battle with smugglers, for a 12-gun cutter tried to make a landing under cover of a bombardment. Reinforcements arrived and all the goods were seized. The following year Lord Orford's Norfolk regiment, camped at Aldeburgh, found thirty "half-ankers" of spirits cleverly hidden in a cave by the sea. Soon afterwards a landing was made at Dunwich, and twenty militiamen mounted on baggage horses chased the smugglers forty miles in four hours. Lord Orford remarked that the clergy, lawyers, and doctors of the area were all smugglers and in Aldeburgh itself every inhabitant was one, except the parson!

The diary of Gowing the bell-ringer has many entries concerning the comings and goings of troops during the American War. In 1782 there are these entries.

June 15. Militia left Beccles headquarters.
27. Two Companies Norfolk came: went out next morning.
28. One troop of horse: one company of Norfolk militia came to town.
29. Two troops of horse came to town.
July 1. One troop of horse came.
2. All four troops marched out.
2 companies of 10th Regt. came.
5. 2 companies of do
31. J. Jarvis' list for a soldier on Tuesday.
Sept 25. Went to the review on Fritton Common.
Oct. 24. Lord Orford and his company pitched tents.

Patriotic fervour in Suffolk at this time is illustrated in a proposal to pay for building a warship by public subscription. Meetings of the

principal landowners were held at Stowmarket in August and September 1782 and a list of subscribers was published. A total of £17,500 was raised. Lord Bristol headed the list with £1,000, several titled men contributed £500 and others £300. Robert Sparrow gave £100, as did sixteen others. There were many smaller subscriptions of which the large number of 63 were from Beccles. These included:

Rev. B. Sparrow £25, Rev. John Amyas £25, Rev. J. Safford £10, Rev. P. Routh 5 guineas, T. Rede (attorney) £25, Le Grice Brown (attorney) £25, Isaac Blowers (draper) £21, J. Esdaile (retired merchant) £21, R. Purvis (surgeon) 6 guineas, Owen Holmes (grocer) 6 guineas, Robert Davey (schoolmaster) 1 guinea.

The contributions of the clergy are notable.

The war ended before the project could be completed. Nor did it escape criticism; there was a lively controversy in which Capel Lofft took a characteristic part. But it is strongly indicative of patriotic feeling and of co-operation within the county.

An incident of the following year shows a different aspect of affairs. Troops quartered in the Beccles area were not, it seems, under the full control of their officers. The "Ipswich Journal" reported on April 26th: "On Thursday morning the 20th Regt. of light dragoons quartered at Saxmundham, Framlingham and other places, assembled at Beccles, went to the guard room there, and released two men, in spite of the colonel and others, who opposed them." No sequel was reported.

There followed a period of ten years' peace until War between England and France broke out in 1793. The effects were felt at once, even in a small town like Beccles. Entries in Gowing's diary tell some of the story:

1792	Dec.	18	The militia embodied.
1793	Feb.	17	Militia came.
	May	28	One of Lincolnshire militia brought from Bungay to Beccles, tried by Court Martial, recd one hundred lashes.
	June	27	Lincolnshire militia marched out.
	July	1	325 Middlesex militia came to town; march for Yarmouth next day.
1794	May	16	York militia marched out of town — 400.
		19	Suffolk militia came 2 days.
		21	Lincolnshire militia do .
1795	July	30	The colours of the Beccles Cavalry consecrated.
1797	Jan.	14	New militia drawn — 16.
		25	John Lincoln committed to jail for buying gunpowder of one of the artillery men.
1798	June	4	An express came for the artillery: marched to Colchester.
1799	Sept.	4	Near 1,000 soldiers in town today, returned from Holland: foot, horse, and artillery.

Similar entries continue; as for example —

1813	Dec.	25 Artillery waggons went thro' the town with ammunition for Holland.

Inn-keepers of the town were hard pressed by the billeting occa-

Beccles in 1811

sioned by all these troop movements. The Corporation helped them, providing twenty-one pounds in 1793. There was also help in money raised by subscription. In May 1794 the "Ipswich Jounral" reported: "We hear the sum of 95£ has been subscribed at Beccles for inn-keepers burdened with militia men, as in the previous year." During the Napoleonic Wars this burden on the inn-keepers became increasingly severe, though it had caused much trouble even in the middle of the century. Isaac Blowers had complained of excessive billeting in 1764 and had attempted to enlist the help of Field-Marshal Sir Robert Rich, then at his home, Roos Hall, just outside the town. But the number of militia men was very much greater at the end of the century. A typical petition was addressed to the Secretary of War from the Ipswich inn-keepers in 1803 declaring that many would have "to leave their present situations unless some speedy relief be given them". The Secretary, however, afforded them nothing.

The war greatly accelerated the enclosure of land, the greatest change in rural England during the period covered by this book. A considerable enclosure had been made at Kessingland, Covehithe and North Hales in 1788, the largest acreage belonging to Sir Thomas Gooch. The extent and rapidity of enclosures in the neighbourhood of Beccles is indicated below:

Date of Award	*Acreage*	*Places*
1797	3,862	Ellough, Worlingham, North Cove.
1799	339	Uggeshall, Frostenden, South Cove.
1799	620	Sotterley, Henstead and Wrentham.
1800	2,529	Barnby and Mutford.
1799	343	Gisleham & Pakefield.
1800	504	Reydon.

Several others followed in the early years of the nineteenth century. And in the meantime Beccles Corporation was steadily enclosing its land, so that eventually only the Race Ground remained open. The great landowners were prominent among the enclosers. In the 1797 enclosure Robert Sparrow paid £703 out of a total cost of £1,124, though there were also fourteen other enclosers who paid sums ranging from £84 to a mere fifteen shillings. In the Henstead enclosure the total cost was £2,209. The principal enclosers were:

Miles Barne	£417
R. Sparrow	122
Rev. J. Amyas	199
John Clarke	137

and there were many smaller contributions. These enclosures — and particularly the number of owners involved — confirms the impression of Arthur Young in his "General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk" (1797) — "the most interesting circumstance is the rich yeomanry . . . very numerous, farmers occupying their own land, from £100 to £400. A most valuable set of men, who having the means and the most powerful inducements to good husbandry, carry agri-

culture to a high degree of perfection." Corn would be grown most profitably on the large farms. The yeomanry prospered.

But there was opposition to these enclosures as bitter as the opposition to the erection of the Houses of Industry. A striking example occurred at Burgh near Acle. When in 1797 the plan for enclosure was made public, eighteen proprietors of land and houses protested vigorously — "It must attend us and our families with utter ruin and destruction, as we cannot then keep neither horse, cow or fowl." The plan received Parliamentary sanction. When, in 1802, the surveyor and two accompanying constables (significant protection) appeared on the site, they were attacked, beaten and wounded, and their lives threatened. The situation became so serious that a troop of Light Horse was summoned from Norwich. Only after the reading of the Riot Act and the arrest of some ringleaders, did the angry crowd disperse.

The social results, particularly the bitterness aroused among those who did not share in the advantages of the enclosures, is strikingly illustrated in a squib preserved in the Rix Collection. It is undated and anonymous, but certainly belongs to this period of wartime enclosure—

"*A Chapter not to be found in the Old and New Testaments*

Verily, verily, I say unto you, the Spirit of Iniquity is gone abroad and the people have turned a deaf ear unto the Voice of Instruction, the peace of the Community hath been broken in the daytime, and in the night season the Slumbers of the Virtuous have been disturbed by the bellowings of the wicked ones. Sobriety hath quitted the Habitations of many, and Intemperance reigneth in its stead. Our young men have forsaken the Truth and in the Evil of their ways they have chosen Bacchus for the God of their Idolatry, the Sabbath day is turned into a day of Festivity, and Dissipation is the order thereof, the sin of monopoly hath sprung up among us and the prices of provisions in consequence have risen. Many farms have been laid into one Farm — yea the little Farmers have been ousted, and the great Farmers have swallowed up the Loaf of their Inheritance, they drink wine into Intoxication and in the midst of their Feasting, remember not the cravings of the poor! To heap unto themselves riches they take counsel of one another and there is no righteousness in their proceedings. Their wives and their daughters have put away Humility from amongst them and clothed themselves in the Fashion of the Times! They have forsaken the ways of their predecessors and are ashamed of being seen in the highway and in the market place with their butter and cheese, the Gig and the Landau have superseded Blind Dobbin and the Cart, the Cloak and the Kirtle are become offensive in their sight, in the pride of their hearts they have said there are none like unto us, we are the Children of Fortune, and who shall make us afraid! But verily, verily, I say unto these, in the day of Peace when the great Farms shall be turned into little Farms, they shall open their eyes and behold the Abominations of their ways, their sins shall press heavily upon them, yea they shall be humbled and no one shall pity them, for whosoever doeth unjustly and oppresseth the poor maketh a Rod for himself and sealeth his own Condemnation."

The year 1795 was particularly severe for the poor. Gowing, who had made no mention of food prices in previous years, recorded in his diary—

1795	July	Meal is now 3/- a stone.
	Dec.	Meal 3/6 a stone. 2nd Flour 4/4.
1796	Mar.	Meal 3/10.
		Meal dropped to 2/6.
1799	Dec.	Meal 3/4. Coal 15d per bushel.
		Mutton and beef 7d a lb. butter 15d a pint.
		Cheese 7d. lb.
1800	Feb.	Meal 4/-
	Dec.	Meal 5/- best flour 6/8.
		Beef 8d a lb. Butter 1/4.

It is not surprising to find that the Corporation made special grants to relieve the poor during these years of high prices and extreme hardship. The provision of small sums under the heading "Bread for the Poor" had long been a regular item in the Corporation expenses. These sums, meagre until the 1790's, were steadily increased —

1794	£6	1795	£6. 6.0	1796	£7. 5.0
1800	£11	1801	£14.10.0	1810	£26.18.3

and at the same time more substantial sums were provided for general relief of the poor, the largest being in 1795 when the Corporation and the Feoffees each provided £25 and later in the year added £100 and £50 respectively. The Corporation also bought coal for distribution, the Town Crier being employed to inform the inhabitants when it was available, as appears in the accounts for 1801 —

"Cadmore for crying the coals 7 times — 7-0"

Amongst the troubles of these years was the financial crisis of 1797. In March of that year, meetings were held at Norwich, Lynn, Yarmouth and Beccles to affirm confidence in the local banks. The "Norwich Mercury" reported "A Meeting of the principal Inhabitants of Beccles of Merchants, Tradesmen, and others to consider the steps proper to be taken to prevent Embarrassment to Public Credit from the Effect of any ill-founded or exaggerated alarms." Three Resolutions were passed:

"That the Expedients adopted by Messrs. R. Rede, Farr and Smith were justified.

That the Bank of this Town is entitled to our confidence

We will continue to receive in Payment the cash notes issued by the said Bank and we recommend others to do the same."

These Resolutions were signed by the Portreeve and thirty-four others, including the Rector and the Curate, the Doctors, principal merchants and shopkeepers. In this year also coins for small change were issued for local use bearing the seal of the Corporation.

Yet social life seems to have continued unchanged at this time. There were the usual Assemblies, the Races, the Fairs, the annual Portreeves' Feasts; and the Theatre had its usual season. There was indeed some additional social interest. French emigrés were widely scattered through the country and to Beccles there came in 1794 a young Frenchman under the name of M. de Combourg. This was Chateaubriand, whose friend Peltier advised him to answer an advertise-

ment for a scholar to decipher some French manuscripts of the twelfth century. Chateaubriand described the episode in his Memoirs. "I took a room at an inn . . . was very well received, saw all the gentlemen in the district and met two officers of our Royal Navy who gave lessons in the neighbourhood. M. de Combourg was invited to every party . . . the women were delighted to meet a Frenchman to talk French with." He is said to have taken much exercise on horseback in the intervals of teaching at Mr. Brightley's school in the town. His own account ends with a highly coloured story of a romantic attachment to Miss Charlotte Ives of Bungay, which led — on his disclosing the fact that he was already married — to his abrupt departure from the neighbourhood and return to London.

Besides the French emigrés, there were many French prisoners in East Anglia. In 1796 there were fifteen of them in Beccles — captains, lieutenants, pilots and a surgeon of frigates, merchantmen and privateers, and a lieutenant-colonel. Five of these officers ran away and the remainder were then moved to Eye.

The country was deeply divided, in 1797, over the continuance of the war. A striking local example occurred after Duncan's victory over the Dutch fleet at Camperdown. Wounded soldiers were landed at Yarmouth. Immediately, as was customary, public subscription lists were opened for the relief of the wounded. "The inhabitants of Bungay testified their joy by setting on foot a subscription for the sick and wounded at Yarmouth, as well Dutch as British. Bills were distributed, stating the purposes for which such subscriptions would be applied and that it would be collected on the following Sunday, at the doors of the Church and Meeting-House. At the Church a considerable sum was collected, amounting with other subscriptions, to over 50£. The Dissenting Minister directed that plates should be held at the doors of the Meeting House; but some of his congregation insisted on their being taken away, alleging that they would not have it said that they contributed to any public measure in support of the war." This refusal to help in the relief of their wounded countrymen shows the local strength of feeling against the war among the Dissenters (or some of them). In the same year hand-bills "tending to seduce the allegiance of soldiers from his Majesty" were thrown over Barrack walls in Norwich. And John Lincoln of Beccles, cooper, was arrested on a charge of stealing gunpowder from the soldiers stationed there; he died in the county goal at Ipswich in April 1798. Three years before, Charles Anderson, yeoman of Beccles, was committed to the County Gaol, on the oath of John Farr, J.P., "charged on suspicion of writing and publishing certain letters containing divers seditions and libellous expressions reflecting upon the government of this kingdom and upon the conduct of his Royal Highness the Duke of York and the armies under his command."

But support for the national effort in the war, as shown by contributions and by service, far exceeded opposition in Beccles, Bungay and the locality. There was a remarkable response to the call for voluntary contributions to the national cause early in 1798. Over £4,000 was quickly subscribed in Norwich. Collections in Bury reached £1,000, of

which the Corporation contributed £200. Militiamen gave up their pay for a month. The Ladies of Dereham collected £71. Litcham labourers contributed a day's wages each. The Corporation of Beccles gave £210.

The responsibility for providing Militiamen belonged to the Parish and a rate was levied to pay for substitutes. The Corporation made several small contributions. Its support of the Volunteers (Infantry and Cavalry) was much more substantial. Thus it gave £50 to the Cavalry in 1796, £40 to the Infantry in 1798, when the number of men in the local corps was 80, and a further £40 two years later. In 1804 £100 was provided for the Infantry. Then there were the payments for the bellringing and the inevitable fireworks as the chequered years of victory rolled on towards Waterloo. Thus five guineas were provided for the local celebration of Trafalgar in 1805.

In that year a Beccles doctor saved a soldier's life in extraordinary circumstances, and was awarded a silver medal by the Royal Humane Society. W. Henchman Crowfoot had just joined his uncle in practice at Beccles. Writing to the Humane Society on behalf of four poor men who helped him, he described the incident thus: "A Transport with a company of 28th Regiment of Infantry on board was wrecked about 11 o'clock on the night of December 16th, on the shore at Kessingland. The soldiers and crew, after experiencing great hardship, were with difficulty landed between 9 and 10 o'clock the next morning, and the former were marched immediately to Lowestoft five miles distant . . ."

"I was accidentally at Kessingland on the morning of the 17th inst. visiting a patient, on my return from whose house I met a cart with some luggage saved from the wreck, and another, following it, with the body of a soldier supposed to be dead.

The man in the cart, who was also a Sergeant in the regiment by the name of Bubb, had about 11 o'clock the night before, from the effects of cold, and, they suppose, of intoxication, sunk apparently lifeless on the deck. From the hurry and alarm incident to their dreadful situation and their supposing him dead, he had been suffered to remain there with the sea constantly washing over him till the morning, when some boats, at infinite hazard, went from the shore to bring off the sufferers. This man had been let down by a rope into one of the boats and brought to land, where he remained two hours lying on the beach. The humanity of four countrymen induced them to place him on a cart, provided for the removal of the officers' baggage, but the Sergeant who had charge of it, thinking a dead body an unnecessary encumbrance had him removed. The countrymen, however, procured another cart, in which they were conveying him to the village when I met them.

Upon examination, I found no symptom of remaining life except a very slight warmth about the precordia. This encouraged me to attempt the poor fellow's recovery, and I desired them to drive him to the inn. It was now about noon, and the man had been supposed dead about 13 hours. I had him stripped, wiped dry. and put in warm blankets. and after three or four hours of unremitting perseverence in the means which I judged most likely to restore suspended animation, I had the inexpressible satisfaction of finding that I had succeeded in rescuing a fellow creature from premature death, and preserving to his

country a robust young soldier. During all this time, I received every assistance from the four countrymen, John Holmes, John Durrant, Joseph Durrant and Charles Chipperfield, who had from the first so meritoriously exerted themselves in the cause of humanity, and although they could not be persuaded that my endeavours would prove successful, their confidence in me, whom they all knew, induced them to persevere.

I will beg leave to suggest that as they are poor men, to whom any small reward would be acceptable, and on a coast where accidents are frequent, a trifling compensation for their trouble might be attended with good effect."

The Royal Humane Society gave suitable rewards to the men who had assisted. But the incident had no happy ending for Sergt. Jas. Bubb. The Regiment had no sooner returned to its Headquarters at Deal, than Bubb was summoned to appear before a Court-martial, and sentenced to receive five hundred lashes on the charge of being drunk while on duty. The sentence was carried out.

All the comings and goings of soldiers, the varied uniforms, the marching, the horses, the martial music — these (the sterner side apart) provided a novel interest in rural life. To a small boy, they meant an exciting addition to daily pleasures. J. B. Scott of Bungay kept a diary for 1799–1800, when he was eight, making one simple entry for each day, from which the following are selected:

1799 May 14. Went to the Bullock Fair with my Grandpapa.
20. I went to see our Volunteers.
24. Some soldiers came to town.
25. I went to hear the Band.
28. I went to see them exercise.
29. The soldiers went away.
31. I went to see our Volunteers.
June 4. Our Volunteers din'd at the Theatre.
12. We brooke up School.
17. I went to see the Volunteers.
20. I tooke a walke with my Mama.
25. We went a Fishing.
29. I helpt to clean the meadow.
July 1. I helpt to pack wool.
3. I went to the Farm a hay making.
11. I took a walk and had my tooth drawn.
12. I helpt to pack Wooll.
22. Mrs. Houghton opened School this day.
23. I went a Fishing.
24. I plaid at School and caught cold.
July 25. I was very ill indeed.
26. My Grandpapa came to see me.
27. I was reather better.
28. I was not well enough to go to Church.
29. I went to see our Volunteers.
30. I took a ride upon my Hobby.
31. I took a walk with my Mama.

August opens with several entries the same as that for July 30. The Hobby was much exercised.

Aug. 20. I went to Flixton Hall with Mr. and Mrs. Barber.
27. I went to the Tuns to hear singing.
31. I went with the Boarders to fly our Kites.
Sept. 6. I rode to the Farm to help the Harvestmen.
7. I went with the Boarders to fly our Kites on the Common.
23. I went to our Fair.
26. I went to our Sessions.
Oct. 2. I spent the evening a reading.
3. I went to school to speak poetry.
11. I played cards at home this evening.
14. I went to Lowestoft and from there to Yarmouth.
17. I amus'd myself this evening with my map.
18. I went to Mr. Brittle's to hear the Band.
23. I played at Dominoes this evening.
Nov. 9. Miss Sophia Bobbit drank tea with me.
12. I played at Cribbage with Hannah.
27. I went to hear our Volunteers Band.
28. I amus'd myself this evening with drawing.
29. I took a walk after Church with my Mama.
30. I went to the Industry House with my Papa.
Dec. 3. I play'd trickets this evening.
4. I play'd Wist this evening.
5. I went to see a Show.
12. Mrs. Houghton brook up school.
13. I took a ride upon my Hobby to Gisleham.
30. I took a ride to Beccles.

During February and March Bungay Theatre had its season and little Scott went to seven different plays.

This diary gives a clear picture of the interests and pleasures of a small boy in a very comfortable home (the Scotts were probably the wealthiest family in Bungay). The pleasures provided by the presence of soldiers must have been at least as great for poorer boys.

For another local boy the war brought a tragically untimely fate. In August 1806 the Gentleman's Magazine included in its obituaries: "Hector, eldest son of Major Alexander of Beccles, a fine spirited youth. He went on board the Resolution at Yarmouth for the first time as a midshipman; and, eager to display an equality of courage with his new associates, mounted the rigging and fell from a considerable height on the deck, fractured both his arms and one thigh, and received a violent contusion on the head, of which he shortly died." Hector Alexander was thirteen.

CHAPTER XX

An Enterprising Land Agent

There died at Beccles, on 3rd February 1855, aged 76, Henry Read Esq., steward to Lord Gosford, "who for upwards of 50 years was employed as a landagent with equal satisfaction to both landlord and tenant."

Such was the brief obituary of a man long resident in the town whose life, especially in youth and early manhood, gives striking evidence that enterprise, backed by a sound education, could lead to a successful career in the country. London was par excellence the Mecca of opportunity in the eighteenth century — and, after London, the large towns. But Henry Read found scope for his useful talents and energetic spirit in the heart of rural East Anglia.

A few years before his death, the old man confided his reminiscences to S. W. Rix, who included them in the Biographical part (three massive volumes) of his Collection.

"I was born at Laxfield, an agricultural parish within six miles of Halesworth, on the 7th of March, 1779. At an early age I was sent to a school in Laxfield kept by a Mr. Simon Lenny, where arithmetic and some of the higher branches of mathematics were taught. My master was a good mathematician and an excellent penman, but as a grammarian he was very deficient. In short his 'whole and leading' passion was to distinguish himself as a mathematician and a penman. He was a large man and his temper was violent in the extreme. When I first began to write, a blot on my book was no unusual thing and it was punished with a ferule, or what the boys called a custard, which was no less than two severe blows on each hand. At the time I am now speaking of, he had nearly a hundred pupils; and the best scholar had the unenviable situation of being his usher. I had a brother two years older than myself (John) and he held this post of honour two years. In consequence of my father being a farmer occupying about a hundred acres and having a family of four sons and one daughter, it was arranged as soon as I was able to attend to the operations of the farm that my brother Jonas should go to school one day and I another. This was rather a fortunate circumstance for me, as Jonas would never pay much attention to literature and I had, in the course of a short time, two days out of three."

Young Henry Read attended this school for about seven years, quite a long schooling in those days. A village school with a hundred pupils, too, was unusually large; the schoolmaster, however severe, must have given value for money. Historians have often decried eighteenth century education. They point to the decay of the ancient grammar schools, the inertia of the universities. But there had arisen,

especially in the second half of the century, a large number of private schools, in response to a growing demand. They must have varied enormously. This rural school shows both their virtues and their shortcomings. Certainly Henry Read's thorough grounding in mathematics was to stand him in excellent stead in later life.

"From fifteen to seventeen years of age, I was generally employed on the farm, but before I had attained my eighteenth year I went to Yoxford to visit my brother John, who, though not twenty years of age, had established an excellent school. After two years of close application to the school, I obtained the situation of mathematical teacher in the Grammar School at Bungay. In the room assigned to me I had four young gentlemen who paid an extra £5 a year for living with me. One of them, the celebrated Francis Turner, taught me Latin, and in return I made him acquainted with algebra. When we parted he well understood quadratic equations. I had been in this comfortable situation nearly six months when my brother John wrote and offered me the school at Yoxford, he having failed in obtaining the approval of a medical gentleman (a rich old dog) to marry his daughter. I accepted the offer and was extremely fortunate and happy."

A brief account follows of the fortunes of the disappointed elder brother. He joined the army; was with Sir Ralph Abercrombie in Egypt; was twice taken prisoner and twice escaped at the Battle of Alexandria; and shortly afterwards went with his regiment to India. There he was killed.

Meanwhile, young Henry prospered at his Yoxford school. The academic round was on one notable occasion varied by an unexpected chance of observing, at close quarters, the great hero of the age. Lord Nelson, on his return from Naples, had landed at Yarmouth. Sir William and Lady Hamilton were with him. They stopped for the night at Yoxford on the way to London. Henry Read, wishing to see as much of the great man as he could, persuaded the innkeeper to let him act as waiter. He noted that Nelson was "an awkward-looking little man, who had his food cut for him in consequence of his having lost an arm." The village hairdresser shaved his Lordship the next morning and dressed Lady Hamilton's hair; and to him her Ladyship expressed her sense of Lord Nelson's superiority to all other heroes.

There soon came an opportunity for Read to turn his academic knowledge to a more profitable advantage. "I had not been at the school two years when I was called upon to assist Mr. Benjamin Whitney in making out a valuation of an estate at and near Kelvedon in Essex, belonging to General Sparrow. After having done this, we (Whitney and myself) went over the whole of the General's estates in Huntingdonshire, in the Isle of Ely, and in Essex. This completed, I made out a book containing every particular, and it was approved of by the General, and by his father, Mr. Sparrow of Worlingham. No sooner was this done than Lord Wodehouse sent for Mr. Whitney to value and let a considerable portion of the Kimberley estate, through the accommodation of Mr. Sparrow who in a letter to Mr. Whitney on the subject said 'Of course you will take Mr. Read with you.' I was rather flattered by this. After spending about three weeks on this

estate and afterwards letting the farms, we returned to Yoxford. But it was only for a few days. Someone had mentioned Whitney to Col. Harbord of Blickling, afterwards Lord Suffield; and we went and let some three or four thousand a year for him. This induced his father, Lord Suffield of Gunton Hall, to employ us; and we let as much, if not more, for him."

Thus the partnership of Whitney and Read flourished exceedingly. Soon Read became the more important of the two, for Whitney, though a shrewd practical man, had one grave disadvantage. He was almost illiterate. On one occasion, in Read's absence, he had to write to a Mr. Peter Portway of Saffron Walden and began thus: "Sur, Hadmol Havey's rent day is fix'd . . ." This letter was passed round and did him some damage! Read, on the other hand, might have been the model for Goldsmith's schoolmaster —

" 'Twas certain he could write, and cypher too;
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage.
And e'en the rumour ran — that he could gauge."

Read now sold his house and school at Yoxford so as to devote all his time and energy to the partnership with Whitney. So rapidly did their fame gain ground that in a year or two the following estates were under their management: Sir John Blois's, Yoxford; Robert Sparrow's, Worlingham; Lord Wodehouse's, Kimberley; General Sparrow's, Huntingdonshire etc: Admiral Harvey's, Essex; Chaloner Arcedeckne's, near Wickham Market. Besides these there were many others where they did not receive the rents, but only let the farms. They saw much of the landed gentry and the local aristocracy. The hard drinking of Regency England is vividly illustrated in this anecdote of 1804 —

"The first time we received Lord Wodehouse's rents we dined at Kimberley Hall, the party about sixty. Those who had never dined there before had *to be shod.* After about fifteen or twenty bumper toasts, an old silver pint is filled with wine, and this must be drunk in one draught. This is quite enough; drunk you must be. Enough of Kimberley."

It seems that Read was by no means uncritical of the wealthy landowners who found his services so useful. His strictures on Robert Sparrow have already been quoted; and Admiral Harvey who had commanded a ninety-eight gun ship at Trafalgar, he found a most uneven-tempered man. "I had been receiving his rents, and presented him with a copy of each tenant's account. This was by no means what he wanted, and he requested that I would make one something in the manner of those kept on shipboard. On the following morning I attended him again, and he, being in a good temper, highly approved of it and gave me £10. This was the very account he had previously objected to!"

The two partners travelled much, mainly in East Anglia, but occasionally further afield. It was on the way to London that they encountered a dangerous adventure. In November 1807 they had been transacting some business with Lady Olivia Sparrow, when she gave Whitney a draft on her bankers, Child & Co. of Temple Bar, for £570, to pay

some tradesmen's bills in Huntingdon. They set off, unarmed, for London. Early in the evening, when a few miles from Royston, they were stopped by two foot-pads, Fordham and Hervey. Whitney had a narrow escape for his life. "He had a pair of nankeen small clothes, over these his cavalry pantaloons, and over these what he called petticoats, which were a thick covering of camlet. His pocket book and watch were soon delivered up, but to get at his purse took some time, and Fordham, thinking that he was feeling for a pistol, clapped his to Whitney's head, and snapped it down; but luckily it flashed in the pan. In the meantime, Harvey was robbing me. He came to my side and presented a pistol to my body, but I lost nothing. I had a watch and pocket book with three one pound Bank of England notes in it, and some money in my purse, but I told Harvey that I was only a servant and had no money. After the robbery, they desired us to drive off or they would 'Blow us to hell!' And they retired into a gravel pit where they threw out all the papers, except two or three five pound notes, and left the pocket book with them. A short time afterwards, a shepherd boy was leading his flock by the pit, and he collected the papers and carried them to his master, who forwarded them to Whitney." Thus was Lady Olivia's draft for £570 recovered.

It turned out that the two robbers were members of a gang of seven, operating from London, and described by the Bow-Street officers as one of the most desperate set of villains in town. They were later apprehended, after a particularly daring robbery, through pawning some stolen clothes. They were tried, and sentenced to be hanged. Whitney and Read went down to Newgate, and the former asked the gaoler if he might give the condemned men a shilling to drink with. This was permitted. Fordham never thanked him, but took the coin saying, "This will do, damned well, for me to buy some gin with."

After this adventure, they always travelled well armed, Whitney with a brace of horse-pistols, and Read with two rifles! "We pledged ourselves never to be robbed again without fighting."

Eventually the partnership was dissolved, when Whitney left Yoxford in 1813. Read took Whitney's farm there. On the death of Mr. Sparrow, the Earl of Gosford, his son-in-law, inherited the Worlingham estate, and Read was recommended as his steward. He then settled in Beccles, and managed several near-by estates besides Lord Gosford's. Thus he had a great deal of work, but less travelling than in his younger days. He had amassed a comfortable fortune.

A final anecdote illustrates the spirit of the man. One morning by accident he met his nephew (also Henry) going to a school in North Cove. "On questioning him about his lesson, I found he had talents worth cultivating. I sent him to a good school at Beccles for seven years and had him taught Latin, English, Arithmetic, Mathematics. He is now able to get his own living."

Many things — besides his sterling character — might be illustrated in the career of Henry Read. The co-operation between landowners is shown by the way in which Whitney and Read were constantly recommended by one of them to another. The great improvement in East Anglian roads at the end of the eighteenth century may be inferred

from the fact that, though travelling at all times of the year, sometimes long distances, Read never mentions any difficulties or delays. Above all, it illustrates the value to a clever man of fairly humble origin, of the education provided in the private schools of the time — an education which eschewed the classics but went far beyond the elements of "the three R's."

CHAPTER XXI

A Literary Cobbler

There lived in Beccles for some years at the beginning of the nineteenth century a cobbler named David Service. He had literary aspirations. His efforts and his modest achievements have some literary and social interest; and the few surviving details of his life have the pathos of "the short and simple annals of the poor".

The last two decades of the eighteenth century witnessed a striking growth in the reading public and in the business of publishing. The "Annual Register" had remarked in 1761: "The reading female hires her novels from some Country Circulating Library, which consists of about a hundred volumes." This paucity of reading matter was soon to be remedied. In his "Autobiography" (1791) the publisher James Lackington wrote: "I suppose that more than four times the number of books are sold now than were sold twenty years ago." The output of the presses was vastly increased during the Napoleonic Wars. A leading figure in this printing revolution was William Clowes, whose family were later to establish the flourishing Caxton Works at Beccles. In 1814 John Walters had installed the first steam-driven machine for printing "The Times"; and nine years later Clowes did the same for printing books at his London Works.

These technical advances, combined with greater demand, made possible a literary fashion characteristic of the early nineteenth century: the patronage by the cultured rich of authors from humble life. This patronage, paradoxically, was an expression of the growth of the democratic spirit. There were in Suffolk two very notable examples of such patrons: Mrs. Elizabeth Cobbold of Ipswich and Capel Lofft, energetic and eccentric owner of Troston Hall near Bury St. Edmunds.

The lively Mrs. Cobbold was a leader of Ipswich cultural life. Her poems appeared in 1825. She was a patron of the theatre. When the officers garrisoned at Ipswich performed "Castle Spectre" at the town theatre in 1805, she wrote an introductory address; and she had

written an epilogue for the same officers when they performed "Oroonoko" for the Lying-in Charity earlier in the same year. Mrs. Cobbold helped Anne Candler, who was living as a pauper in Tattingston Workhouse (her husband having enlisted), to publish her poems and to move into comparative comfort in lodgings.

An extraordinary outburst of poetical composition occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century. Lord Cranbrook in "Parnassian Molehill" lists over fifty volumes of poetry published by Suffolk writers alone between 1775 and 1810 and of these writers a dozen were women. A high proportion of the would-be poets were clergymen. There were also several born in poverty. Besides Ann Candler, there were, for instance, the tramp, James Chambers, and William Plowman, a tanner of Bungay, who, having been caught poaching on the land of Sir Charles Blois, published in revenge "Concise remarks on Game Mania by Flagellus." Sarah Finch, who married Capel Lofft, wrote sonnets, some of which her husband included in his collection "Laura" in 1814.

The changing attitude towards women authors is shown in the Preface to "Original Poems on Several Occasions" (1769) by Clara Reeve of Ipswich: "I formerly believed that I ought not to let myself be known for a scribbler, that my sex was an insuperable objection, that mankind in general were prejudiced against its pretensions to literary merit; but I am now convinced of the mistake, by daily example to the contrary. I see many female writers favourably received, admitted into the rank of authors and amply rewarded by the public." Robert Sparrow and Bence Sparrow were among the subscribers to her book.

Capel Lofft, like Mrs. Cobbold, was both author and patron. He was an extraordinary man. A barrister and magistrate, he was equally vigorous in opposing the slave trade and advocating parliamentary reform. John Glyde in his "New Suffolk Garland" (1866) gives a spirited description of an incident of 1800 which led to Lofft's being struck off the list of magistrates. A Hadleigh girl, Sarah Lloyd, no more than twenty years old, had been condemned to death for stealing from a house goods to the value of forty shillings. The facts were in dispute; great interest was excited on the girl's behalf. Lofft obtained a delay in the execution for fourteen days; and a petition was sent whose signatures were headed by the Duke of Grafton; but to no avail. Then Lofft "obtained permission from the under Sheriff, and at the place of execution he ascended the cart and stood up to address the great black mass of human beings that had been drawn together to see their fellow creature strangled." The girl, dressed in white, was by his side. He spoke for fifteen minutes, the crowd hushed into utter silence. "His heart was full of his subject, and his poetic temperament, fired with indignation at the treatment he had received from the Tory government, caused him to excel himself on this solemn occasion. His speech flashed with the lightning of genius, thrilled the multitude, and the poor victim by his side, though much agitated, gave evident signs of approving of what he said. A short prayer intervened, she was launched into eternity amid the tears of the people; and Mr. Lofft, for his exertions,

was, without intimation from the Government, struck off the list of magistrates."

Lofft was the patron of that admirable Suffolk minor poet, Robert Bloomfield, to whom David Service was to write a small poetic tribute. Bloomfield was the son of a tailor at Honington. He was an infant under a year old when his father died, and his mother,a schoolmistress, was left to struggle with a family. When the boy was eleven, he was sent to his uncle, a farmer at Sapiston; here he acquired those deep and joyous impressions of rural life which he was to elebrate in "The Farmer's Boy". Too delicate for the toil of work on the farm, he was sent later to join two of his brothers who were shoemakers in London. There, in a garret, surrounded by six or seven other workmen, he composed his poem. London publishers refused it. However, the manuscript was sent to Capel Lofft, who at once saw its merits, and arranged for its publication in 1800. Its success was great and immediate. In three years 26,000 copies were sold. A sixth edition was published in 1807 and a tenth in 1808. It was translated, in whole or in part, into Latin, French and Italian. A brief quotation may illustrate the charm of "The Farmer's Boy". The boy Giles is resting "in lonely ease" after some strenuous bird-scaring —

"Just where the parting boughs' light shadows play,
Scarce in the shade, nor in the scorching day,
Stretch'd on the turf he lies, a peopled bed,
Where swarming insects creep around his head.
The small dust-colour'd beetle climbs with pain
O'er the smooth plantain-leaf, a spacious plain!
Thence higher still, by countless steps convey'd,
He gains the summit of a shiv'ring blade,
And flirts his filmy wings, and looks around,
Exulting in his distance from the ground."

Bloomfield at his best can rival John Clare. No such claim can be made for David Service, though he, like Bloomfield, was a candidate for Capel Lofft's patronage.

Here are the dedications of three of Service's Works:

"The Wild Harp's Murmurs: or Rustic Strains" (1806)
"Dedicated, by permission, to his Grace the Duke of Argyll"
"A Voyage and Travels in the Regions of the Brain" (1808)
"To that Friend of Literature
Capel Lofft Esq.
Troston Hall, Suffolk.

The third example is his tale "The Village Cobbler, or History of the Life and Adventures of Donald Gillibraston" (1814) which was dedicated to Mrs. Cobbold — though this dedication, it seems, was unauthorised.

"The Village Cobbler" received a brief and unfriendly notice in the Norwich literary magazine, "The East Anglian Spectator", though the author's Preface was given and is worth inclusion here:—

"The Author's Preface containing some truth, some humour and some broad hints to those who have money to spare is as follows:

'Profit, praise or usefulness, commonly induce an author to appear

in public — the author of the following pages has but little to say in their defence, the melancholy situation of his family and domestic affairs he hopes will atone for the many deficiencies in its composition...

If the reader at any time thinks the colouring too glaring for the modest garb of truth, this shall be his reply: the author has seen and felt too much of the subject: for lesser grammatical errors, his not having been bred at Athens may be an apology.

Beccles Feb. 22 1814. David Service.

The Norwich critic continues acidly: "From the above it will be inferred that, by purchasing 'The Village Cobbler', a pecuniary service will be rendered to its author. We have no further recommendation of the book to offer — the story, which is coarse and vulgar, is probably intended as a caricatural sketch of Mr. Service's own life."

These strictures show the changing literary taste of the times. Much of the best literature of the eighteenth century, until about 1780, is coarse. Smollett, the best observer of the social scene in the second half of the century, is coarse; nor would he have been half as effective without coarseness. But the greater refinement of English society had made coarseness much less acceptable in literature; and "The Village Cobbler" was damned — though it contains little to offend. However, the delineation of the seamy side of life was in fact, the forte of David Service. In his "A Tour in Pursuit of Ideas, being a Picturesque View of all the Yarmouth Public Houses" (sold by Cattermole, Beccles, Mitchell, Bungay etc.) the lively description presents a riotous scene —

> "Then to the Globe I staggering, swaggering steer,
> Dance to the catgut with the wenches there!
> See what a scene this Globe of ours displays,
> What customs, manners, pleasures, rigs and ways!
> Quite overcharg'd, a heterogeneous rabble,
> Push, squeeze and cram and with each other squabble.
> Pimps, girls and cobblers, watermen and sailors,
> Soldiers and bullies, muckboys, weavers, tailors,
> Mix in one mass and make confusion dire,
> Empty the goblet fraught with liquid fire;
> Half-naked wenches, bobbing to the fiddle,
> Imparting kisses — held around the middle!"

It is a scene Rowlandson would have relished. And if Service himself was accustomed to making such Tours, no wonder he lived in wretched poverty.

And indeed in 1805 he was the subject of a notice inserted in the newspapers by the Yarmouth overseers —

"ABSCONDED from the parish of Great Yarmouth — David Service, a native of Scotland, by trade a cordwainer, leaving his wife and children chargeable to the said parish. He is about 35 years of age, of a fair complexion, slender make and flaxen hair. Whoever will give information of the said David Service, shall receive FIVE GUINEAS reward; and whoever harbours the said David Service after this notice, will be proceeded against, as the law directs."

This notice appeared once only, so presumably the errant poet-

cordwainer returned promptly to the domestic fold. He was soon engaged on a subject very different from that of public houses.

"On the Death of the late Lord Viscount Nelson" shows him expressing the public sentiment, in conventional elegiac tones, on a theme that employed many contemporary pens. These lines in lighter vein, "The Poet and the Guinea", have some interest in the incidental details of contemporary prices. A kind patron has given him a guinea; he and his wife are to replenish their scanty wardrobe in a shopping expedition —

"For eighteen pence I'll breeches buy,
Design'd to last eternally;
For tenpence, waistcoat I'll secure
That will this winter well endure;
Two decent petticoats, my dear,
Shall two-and-sixpence purchase there;
Cap, bonnet, stockings, and a shawl,
One half-crown, love, will buy them all."

Whilst living in Yarmouth, Service tried his hand at political pamphletereing in a series of papers "The Black Rod". This quotation shows him being heavily sarcastic at the expense of farmers: "Don't farmers understand as much of the constitution as tinkers and tailors and sellers of old rags and shavers of beards and cutters of corns and the whole musty race of politician mechanics? Oh yes, be assured your farmers are as knowing as the best of them. No men keener, except where their own interest is concerned and there they're 'very babes and sucklings'! An idiot might impose upon them, in so simple a yea and nay manner do they manage all their proceedings. *They* raise the price of corn and keep down the price of labour? *They* throw the parish rates off their own shoulders to burthen other people's? *They* suffer the poor to starve while the grain is moulding and rotting in their granaries? No, no. It is your Suffields, your Walpoles and your Wodehouses and your Lacons and the abominable Tory Agriculturalists that are guilty of all these high crimes and misdemeanours. As for the farmers and the sheep-shearers and the Whigs of Norfolk and the Cokes of Holkham, good easy creatures, they have only one fault . . . too honest by half for the vile world they live in!" This passage shows that Service could turn out lively political propaganda, in the manner and style of Cobbett.

As Goldsmith idealised his Deserted Village, and Bloomfield in his London garret idealised the rustic scenes of his boyhood, so David Service idealised the pleasant town of Beccles. His poem on Beccles runs to thirteen verses, of which these are typical:

"Is there a town that's always blest
With peace and plenty, ease and rest;
Which neither storms no floods molest?
'Tis Beccles!

Is there a church with steeple high,
And bells resounding through the sky,
With room between for passers-by?*
'Tis Beccles!

*Referring to the detached tower of the Parish Church.

Is there a pleasant market town,
With churchmen and dissenters known,
Who live in peace, and never frown?
'Tis Beccles!

And so on through verses eulogising the girls and the gardens, the ale and the inns.

Bloomfield's last years were clouded with poverty and melancholy. The fate of Service was no less sad. His last years were spent in Yarmouth. He died in the workhouse.

CHAPTER XXII

A Little Matter of a Footpath

Cobbett describes how as a small boy he worked with his brothers on his father's farm; and how, at the end of the long day, he was so weary that he could scarcely summon enough energy to climb the stiles on the way home. This was in the 1760's before enclosures altered the face of rural England. Among the many results of these enclosures was the drastic alteration of local roads and footpaths. The importance of footpaths to the agricultural labourer was great; for he might, like Cobbett, have a longish walk to his work. The closure of a footpath could be a serious matter to him. It does not appear that the interests of labourers was considered in the making of elaborate plans for roads and paths which formed part of any approved enclosure. But sometimes people of influence might champion the cause of the labourer. Such was the case in a dispute at Beccles in 1811, though the labourers' champion was not disinterested — his family pride and convenience were involved.

The principal protagonists were Robert Rede and G. W. B. Bohun, whose character is sketched in the chapter "The Swing of the Moral Pendulum". Both men came of families long resident and prominent in the district. Both had served the office of Portreeve. Both were middle-aged attorneys.

In 1810 Thomas Rede, father of Robert, died. The following summer Robert Rede applied to Robert Sparrow J.P. for permission to close a footpath leading from Ballygate to Ringsfield green. He proposed to establish another footpath on his land, but from a different part of Beccles, to Ringsfield. The Redes' connections with Sparrow were close. Thomas Rede had acted as Deputy Steward at the manorial court for Sparrow, who was Lord of the Manor, for many years. He was twice a Commissioner in enclosure awards in which much of Sparrow's estate was concerned.

Now Bohun lived in Ballygate Street. As soon as he heard of Robert Rede's application, he organised a strong opposition to it. First, he obtained the support of many prominent Becclesians, including the curate, two attorneys, two doctors, the wealthy merchant Edward Arnold, Robert Harmer (many years a churchwarden), and the redoubtable Isaac Blowers.

Among the signatories was Joshua Green, an attorney living in Ballygate Street. There had been a row between him and Robert Rede in 1809. Green was so embittered that he caused a sixteen-page pamphlet to be printed and circulated, setting forth his version of the dispute —

"A Summary of Occurrences connected with the late partnership of Rede and Green."

"Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee."

Green had come to Beccles from London in 1807, when Rede's partnership with Jeremiah Smith ended. He inserted in the pamphlet the full correspondence between Rede and himself leading to his acceptance of partnership. It is clear that the wealthy Rede wanted some young man to do the work in a long-established practice. Money was the principal bone of contention; Green thought he had not received anything like his fair share. Besides, his pride had been hurt, for evidently Rede had treated him as socially inferior —

"Mr. Rede accused me of being poor: But is poverty a crime? No! indigence and honour will ever be preferable to affluence without respectability!"

After another dig at Rede's "arrogance and riches", the pamphlet finished thus: "Lest it should be thought that I would yield to Mr. Rede's wishes, I think proper to say, that it is not my intention to give up my practice in Beccles." He was still in Beccles in 1811. He must have signed the objection to the proposed change of footpath with considerable pleasure.

A formal objection was sent to Sparrow on the grounds of the inconvenience to people living in that part of the town affected by the proposed change, the probable loss of business to residents of Ballygate Street and the increased journeys of labourers from Beccles to Ringsfield and neighbouring villages. Bohun estimated that in one year the extra distance would be seventy-four miles for every such labourer. To re-inforce this point, he obtained the signatures of forty-four labourers, from Beccles, Ringsfield and two other villages, who regularly used the footpath for going to work or to Beccles market. The objection was sent to Sparrow on June 4th.

Four days later Sparrow sent a personal letter to Bohun. He was very angry. He asserted that Bohun, by implying that he was known to be favourably disposed to Rede's proposal, had impugned his impartiality as a magistrate. (It seems probable that Sparrow was so disposed, for a letter to him from Rede of July 1st contains the sentence — "May I ask the favour of being informed whether you have any objection to the order for diverting the footpath being prepared, so that it may be enrolled at the next Sessions?") Besides being angry at the supposed reflection on his impartiality, Sparrow also objected

to the form of the objections — they were strongly worded — "it does not increase the respectability they otherwise deserve." He must have been referring to the inclusion of the signatures of labourers; nearly half of them were so illiterate that they could only make a mark; and he concluded with a sentence which clearly reveals the autocratic country magistrate — "I know nothing should be more indifferent to an honest man than public opinion"'

It was a harsh and angry letter. But Bohun was not easily intimidated. He immediately replied — "I shall have exceedingly to regret if this untoward Footpath should in any degree lead to the forfeiture of that Friendship which I have invariably experienced from you and which I have always held in high estimation. But deeply as I should lament the circumstance, still the Duty I owe to the Town and to my own Family in particular compels me to resist all further Infringements by Mr. Rede or any other individual upon the just Rights and Privileges of the place, already too much Inconvenienced for the want of Footpaths at our end of the town, by his Father's alterations . . ." He then proceeded to administer a magisterial rebuke to the Magistrate. "In regard to public opinion, I hope I may be allowed to observe without offending, that public opinion is not on all occasions held in such low esteem as you, sir, in this instance view it, for what but public opinion, expressed by Petition and remonstrance, prevented Lord Sidmouth's bill from passing into law — so that it is not unusual, even in the highest Court of Judicature, to allow public opinion weight." However, Bohun now shifted the stress in his objections; it was the inconvenience to his family he urged most strongly. He said nothing about the labourers.

Several letters followed in rapid succession from both men, the principal subject being the personal relationship between them; and eventually a reconciliation, so far as that relationship was concerned, seems to have been effected.

It would be unfair to Sparrow to imply that he was actuated only by annoyance. The touchiness about his impartiality as a magistrate reveals his real sense of responsibility. He did not take his duties lightly. Nor was his interpretation of the Act relating to applications for closing or altering footpaths unreasonable: that the owner of the land must be allowed to make such alterations as he desired, unless very good reasons could be adduced against such alterations.

An interesting point about the objection is the evidence it provides of agricultural labourers living in the town but working in neighbouring villages. "In some parts of the year the Redisham Hall farm alone has employed ten to twelve pairs of hands from Beccles." If one farm sometimes employed at least ten labourers from Beccles, how many farm labourers were there altogether in the town? It is impossible to determine this. But one certain deduction can be made: a long walk to and from work was nothing unusual. Redisham Hall is four miles from Beccles. What physical burden was added to the hard life of the labourer by the closing or alteration of footpaths?

The Magistrates allowed Rede's application.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Affair of the Mottoes

The chronicles of a small town would surely be incomplete without some example of gossip, back-biting, petty discord — the silly froth rising from time to time to the surface of its social life.

The notoriety of gossip in small towns provides amusing matter in one of Vicesimus Knox's Essays (1778) — "On the Retirement to a Country Town", in which is told the sad disillusionment of a London tradesman. Having amassed a comfortable fortune by the age of forty, this worthy citizen decides to retire; and seeing an advertisement for a large house with garden and grounds of twenty acres, to be let at £50 a year, he disposes of his business and takes the lease of the house, which is situated in a small market town. There "I set up a post-chaise, kept several horses, and two livery servants." But this expensive array fails to impress the local society. The squire's wife is heard to report "Well, have you seen the new-comers? Pray how do you like Mrs. Townsend? Oh! I have heard a charming little anecdote concerning her. You must know, I have learnt who she was before she was married. I thought as much—her father was a cheese-monger in Thames street..."

The men were no more favourable. "At the first weekly club after our arrival, the squire, the attorney, the apothecary, and two or three gentlemen sots, who lived upon their means, as it is called, sat in judgment upon my character. After much debate, I was found guilty of being a cockney, of never having hunted, of never having shot a partridge, of keeping a poor table, and yet, at the same time, of living above my fortune. The result was, that though they should condescend to call upon me, as long as my pipe of excellent Port lasted, yet I was not to be admitted a member of their jolly society."

"The envy, the jealousy and the impertinence of the lower sort of people is not less conspicuous and troublesome than that of their superiors. If we send to buy anything, we are forced to pay something more than anybody else, because we are the rich new-comers... If a cousin or old acquaintance comes from London for a few days, and happens to take an evening walk with one of my daughters, unaccompanied by me or my wife, he is going to be married to one of them directly. His name, his age, his origin are immediately divulged; the fortune on both sides ascertained and the day fixed." Eventually the exasperation caused by petty gossip causes this quondam tradesman and would-be gentleman to move — to a quiet village.

A curious and amusing example of the dire effects of gossip has been preserved in the Rix Collection. It concerns happenings in the town during the early years of the nineteenth century and is related in a privately circulated satire whose author kept a discreet anonymity.

He amused himself by inventing names for the people concerned in the squabble, most of whom thought of themselves as among the "principal inhabitants" — a phrase still in common use at the time. He must have indulged in exaggeration here and there and touched up some of the speeches with evident gusto; yet there is a ring of truth about his facetious narrative addressed to

"The free, candid and impartial Inhabitants
of Beccles and its vicinity" —

"All the early accounts of the subject have been long before the public. It would therefore be a mere waste of time to repeat the different parts of the history at length. For instance, how Mr. Church the baker made a large cake — how Miss Waggoner saw and admired it — how she called upon most of the respectable persons in the town to raffle for it — how she had more subscriptions than were required — how some ladies recalled their subscriptions — how the cake was at length raffled for — how Mrs. Forrester won it — how there were twenty-two shillings subscribed instead of twenty-one — how Miss Waggoner bought mottoed sweetmeats with the odd shilling — how she arranged the mottoes for the different bachelors and maidens present — how she delivered the mottoes at Mrs. Forrester's last rout — how great a degree of chagrin, surprise and indignation burst forth on the occasion — and how the subject became the source of general conversation, animosity and quarrelling ever since."

There was greater cause for indignation to follow. Some injudicious person wrote and published "a garbled, false and exaggerated account of the affair." This person, says our facetious author, cannot have been present when the mottoes were distributed, for his account contains some gross errors. He assets that Mr. Crossley was ridiculed for being a puppy, whereas his motto was expressly this —

'When I walk with the ladies in the street
O, how my little heart does beat.'

And again, the writer most erroneously asserts that when Miss Tomasina Faraway read her motto, she found it to be 'You think yourself of great consequence, but I wonder where it comes from' — whereas Miss Faraway's motto was in fact this —

'Of consequence I have my share
The only wonder is from where!'

To put a stop to the dissemination of this malicious account, the principal parties concerned determined to hold a public meeting where all could express their sentiments and by means of which the author might be discovered — perhaps!

They applied for the use of the Public Hall, but this the Chief Magistrate (Robert Sparrow, designated by our satirical author "Fee-fo-fum") refused. The great room at the Falcon was therefore engaged. "Chairs were placed at the top of the room for the more respectable and benches for the vulgar." A president having been elected, Mr. Servitor addresses the meeting —

"Is there anyone here to whom I am unknown? Is there anyone here who can say I ever gave offence where it was my interest to acquire approbation? Have I ever been known to differ in opinion from the

rich and great? Have I ever ventured to contradict the opinions of those above me? I defy all and everyone present to say that, in whatever company I have been, I have not conducted myself to conciliate and approve. Have I been present among jovial companions? Who more jovial than myself? Have I been one of the evangelical assembly? Who more devout than I? . . ."

He goes on to say that he has ascertained the opinion of the majority. It is against Miss Waggoner and therefore "I strongly *reprehend* her conduct in arranging the offensive mottoes at Mrs. Forrester's rout . . . All know the great Fee-fo-fum, our chief magistrate, or lord, our everything — a man liberal to his servants, charitable to the poor — a benefactor to the town — a man at whose frown all tremble, at whose smile all rejoice. I, Mr. President, have had the honour of conversing with this great personage on the subject. *He* disapproves of the conduct of Miss Waggoner . . ."

Now rises Mr. Huntabout, to the surprise of the meeting, for neither he nor any of his family connections have ever been admitted to the higher social circle. He pours scorn on Mr. Servitor. "The fact is, if Fee-Fo-Fum had approved of the conduct of Miss Waggoner, so would the gentleman; if Fee-fo-fum praised the anonymous paper in question, so would the gentleman; if Fee-fo-fum had said black was white, so would the gentleman . . ." and more in the same sarcastic vein. He *approves* of the conduct of Miss Waggoner for she has dared to show, in the face of all, what were her real opinions of the respective persons who attended Miss Forrester's rout. The satire continues: "When he had finished speaking the rabble about the door evinced general marks of approbation by loud cheers; but the higher orders, on the contrary, were not sparing in their hisses and groans. During which confusion, the attention of the company was suddenly called to another object. The cheers and hisses ceased, and a cry was heard at the door — 'Make way, make way!' At length appeared the dowager Mrs. Frump, supported on either side by Mrs. Frip-frap and Mrs. Furbelow. She advanced towards the top of the room, and, with the tremulous voice of age and incipient fatuity, commenced —

'Mr. President, - I - I - I - Mr. President - I - I - O that my poor dear Mr. Frump were here! What a man *he* was! *He* would have set all things to rights! *He* would soon have put a stop to such proceedings. Mr. President, you would have smiled if you had seen him — O *he* was a wonderful, kind, goodhearted man! . . .

So she rambles on, pitied by some and laughed at by others, until, exhausted, she sinks into the chair Mr. Servitor offers; and as she does so, Miss Louisa Bracelet pushes forward to harangue the meeting. She, like Mr. Huntabout, is not admitted to the higher social circle. And in her speech we see clearly the root of all the fuss —

"Why is *my* tongue to be tied? Is not this a *public* meeting? Have I not as great a right to be heard as *others*? *You* Mrs. Mongo, and *you*, Miss Razor, what have *you* to say? And what have I done to offend *you*, Mrs. Crossley? Have I not a right to make my hat like *yours*, Mrs. Mongo? and my spencer like *yours*, Miss Razor? and to

buy ribbands like *yours*, Mrs. Crossley? Am I inferior to any of you in anything except not being invited to your *card-parties*? Are not most of *you* descended from honest farmers? — from grocers? — from shoemakers? — from tailors? from peruke-makers? Where then is your rank and dignity above *mine*? If you will not allow me to sit at your card tables, I can still vie with you in dress and external appearance . . ." but here her speech is lost in a barrage of hisses and stampings. She subsides. Mrs. Beat-the-bush follows; and, after some cutting comments on Miss Waggoner, ("she shall never be invited to my card parties when my worthy cousins are present") gives her opinion that they should consider the more important matter of how to discover the author of the scurrilous paper.

Pursuing this idea, Mrs. Servitor proposes that a Committee be appointed to interview all the suspected authors — both men who were present at Mrs. Forrester's rout and men who were not — and put the question directly to each of them: Are you the culprit? And here she boldly names more than a dozen suspects. However, her proposal is criticised by Mr. Dominick (the author's name for Rev. Bence, the Rector). The guilty party, he says, would not confess; and besides the method suggested "appears to me to be inquisitional and entirely in opposition to the boasted freedom of Englishmen."

So Mrs. Servitor's proposal is brushed aside; and now Mr. Nightthought advances a supposition which throws the ladies into confusion: he thinks the author was probably a female! Many of the ladies immediately retire. Those who remain are incessant in their clamour against the suspicion thrown out against their sex by the last speaker. At the last President restores order — regrets that irrelevant subjects have been introduced — prays that all animosity may henceforth cease — hopes their tea, their cards, their wine and their cake will again afford them the pleasure which has never been interrupted before the late and unhappy occurrence took place. So saying, he vacates the chair, is thanked for his services; and the company disperse.

The local satirist concludes: "I sincerely hope I may not again have reason to appear before the public. Should, however, anything further take place, I shall not fail, so great is my desire for promoting their welfare and real advantage, to give them the earliest intelligence — till such time I shall continue to be their

obsequious, devoted, humble servant."

It seems that there were no more recriminations. The public meeting achieved a useful result; an outlet was provided for the steam of indignation. And, petty though it all is, the story throws much light on life in a small town at this time. We may notice the extraordinary method of calling an open public meeting; the freedom with which women were permitted to express their opinions (they would have not done so in the mid-Victorian age); the importance in social life of card parties — and the still greater importance of receiving invitations to them! We see the pride of those who had gained the freedom of local genteel society, and the envy of those who had not. Jane Austen would have understood it all thoroughly, from the too-candid outburst of Miss Louisa Bracelet to the over-obsequious de-

ference of Mr. Servitor to the proud and domineering chief magistrate — "Fee-fo-fum."

This tale of a storm in the local teacup has a bantering tone. A sharper sarcasm is felt in another squib from which the following is an extract —

"To be sold by Auction
Town Grand Cairo on the 1st of April 1807
By Sam Slyboots.

The following Acquisitions well worth the Notice of a discerning Public —

1. The honour and independence of the Body corporate
2. The L – d of the Ma – rs Popularity, Dignity and Liberality
3. The Re – rs sublime doctrine and his practice, so congenial to that doctrine
4. Old Tom Gripe's Integrity and quiet conscience
5. Snarly Bob's Eloquence and Public spirit.
6. My Lord Snag, alias Spanger's Predilection for Timepieces and his art of living at other people's expense
7. Dr. Prattle's art of pimping and Mrs. Prattle's candour
8. The Tenderness and Sensibility of Lady Blast's immaculate Daughters, composing the society of stale virgins
9. The perversions, covert Evidences and clandestine Information of that lurcher's Spy, Charley Factotum to all Trade

The whole will be sold without reserve
Pro Bono Publico."

Numbers 2 and 3 refer to Robert Sparrow and Rev. Bence Sparrow; numbers 4 and 5 to Thomas Rede, the rich attorney, and his son Robert (for whose unpopularity, see "A Little Matter of a Footpath"); and number six to the usher at the Free School. The identity of the others, taken from a list of 26 Becclesians, male and female, is doubtful.

CHAPTER XXIV

The Great Celebration of 1814

England had been at war, with one brief respite, since 1793. Though peace was desperately needed and ardently desired, there could be no peace until Napoleon had been defeated and overthrown. But early in 1814 it seemed that at long last the years of endurance were drawing to a close. The last decade of the war has been called "The Years of Victory", and great victories there were; but there was no diminution of hardship.

On April 6th, 1814, Gowing recorded in his diary: "Raised the Bells for the taking of Paris: 10s. drink: a large fire on the plain tonight." Four days later he recorded: "Raised the Bells for news from Paris: Bonaparte resigned."

The sense of relief and joy throughout the country was seen in the immediate preparations to mark the happy and momentous occasion. There were to be celebrations greater than had ever been seen before.

On May 19th a printed handbill was circulated in Beccles:

THE PORTREEVE
Requests The Inhabitants to Meet Him
At The
TOWN HALL
On Tuesday next, at 9 'clock in the Morning, to
take into Consideration the proper mode of
CELEBRATING
The Expected Definitive
TREATY OF PEACE

The first result of this meeting was a subscription list. The Celebration would be financed, as such things customarily were, by private subscription, but with the Corporation and the Feoffees making substantial contributions. Some 180 people subscribed sums ranging from £10 to 5/- and the total reached £462.10.6, of which the Corporation and the Feoffees had provided £200. This useful total promised well.

How seldom are such local enterprises carried through in complete harmony; how often some pique, some petty quarrel mars the story! So it was on this occasion. The cause was a misunderstanding over the payment of £10, the subscription of Robert Sparrow, whose life and character have been sketched in Chapter 3. Sparrow thought he had paid this money at the King's Head on a Saturday to some gentleman "whose name he could not recollect but who was active in the business." Moreover, an entry had been made in his account book showing the payment. The Committee, however, not having received his subscription, apparently queried this entry and asked him for the £10. He was very angry. "Which of you," he wrote to "the gentlemen of the Vestry", "would receive such a suggestion but with indignation? Do you consider the sacred nature of a Book of Accounts? that it is a solemn record of transactions passed? that the laws of our country make it evidence between man and man and that nobody but a fool or a swindler can make such an entry as you suppose me to have done?"

The Committee now called upon the Rector, Rev. Bence Bence, to approach the irate local magnate. Now Rev. Bence was Sparrow's brother. Certainly he must have known the obstinacy of this haughty landowner. He sent a little note perhaps to pave the way for an awkward interview —

"Dear Brother,

I prefer writing to you to a viva voce conversation on a subject I have frequently discussed with you but on which you would have heard no more from me had I not been pressed into the service in a manner I could not refuse. At our last Vestry came over again for the 50th time the subject of your Subscription . . ."

Poor Mr. Bence! What Robert Sparrow's reaction to this note was, is not recorded; but a very brief note from Bence to the Committee reads:

"Gentlemen,

If you meet on Mr. Sparrow's business I cannot attend."

However, he did what he could to appease the Committee. Several gentlemen and prosperous tradesmen contributed £10, and these were the highest subscriptions except for one — Mr. Bence's. Against his name appears the sum of £20!

The Rector was a member of the general Committee of twelve for organising the Festival. The Independent Minister, Rev. Sloper, was also a member. The organisation was most carefully planned through no less than eight sub-committees, which had the following responsibilities:

1. Managing the Tables, Seats etc.
2. Finding Table Cloths.
3. Finding Beef and Suet.
4. Supplying Bread, Flour, Raisins, Cooking etc.
5. Supplying Beer and Ale.
6. Management of the Bonfire.
7. Conducting the Fireworks, Pig Hunt and Donkey Races.
8. For the Effigy of Buonaparte, Transparencies, Music, Triumphal Arch and Grand Procession.

The great day was fixed for Friday, June 17th, so there were four weeks in which to prepare. It was decided to hold a Rowing Match on the River in the morning; the dinner for 2,000 people, in the open air, was to be at 2 p.m. This colossal meal — with the fourteen toasts after the food had been despatched! — was expected to last until 5 p.m. Then there would be the Grand Procession round the Town, proceeding to the Common for the Sports; and finally the Bonfire and the Fireworks.

It is interesting to observe how closely this pattern followed that adopted at near-by Bungay, where the regulations included:

"Grace to be said, and Dinner to begin at the firing of a signal Gun.

After Dinner, the Toasts to be given will also be announced by the firing of a Gun; and on the Drum beating the long roll, the Company to CHEER.

At five o'clock a Procession will conduct the Company to the Common where a variety of Sports will amuse the Spectators till the proper time for exhibiting the Fire Works, Bonfire etc. which will conclude the diversions of the Day."

Among the regulations at the much larger Festival at Yarmouth was this:

"A Barrel of Beer to be placed at each Table; a steady Person to be appointed by the Steward at each Table to attend at the Barrel, and one or two others to carry the Beer round in large Cans or Jugs, to be distributed to the Company at the Tables."

The steadiness of these Persons must have been well and truly tested before the drinking was over! Indeed, one of the worries of the

BECCLES

FESTIVAL.

THE COMMITTEE for conducting the PROCESSION and SPORTS, on Friday, the 17th of June, submit the following Plan to the President of each Table and to the Public in general.

At 11 o'clock in the Forenoon,

A

Rowing Match

By BOATS with not more than Four Oars, for ONE GUINEA. The second Boat will be entitled to 5*s*.

At 5 o'clock in the Afternoon,

THE

PROCESSION

Will March once round the Town and proceed to the **Common**, where the following SPORTS will take place.

A PONEY RACE for £1 s1.

Once round the Course, the best of Three Heats. The second-best Poney will be allowed 5*s*. To pay 1*s*. entrance, or double at the Post, and to name to Mr. Cattermole, Clerk of the Course.

A Donkey Race for 10*s*. 6*d*.

Two Pig Hunts,

ACCORDING TO THE USUAL RULES.

Next will be given Half a Guinea to be contended for by Men JUMPING IN SACKS, each man to bring his own Sack.

After which a FOOT RACE for 10*s*. 6*d*. Second-best 2*s*. 6*d*.

TO CONCLUDE WITH A

Bonfire & Display of Fire-Works.

Poster of Beccles Festival

organisers was the danger of widespread drunkenness. Yarmouth was not a placid town. There had been a serious riot in 1795. It was decided to hold some sports between the dinner in the afternoon and the bonfire in the evening "to prevent any disorder or confusion which might arise from so many persons, stimulated by strong ale."

The many banners in the Yarmouth procession included one: "Europe saved by the example of England." The effigy of Buonaparte (no celebration was complete without one) was on a Sledge "drawn by twenty Peasants". On his right hand stood one of Neptune's attendants with a drawn sabre over his head, and on his left, another "Presenting a Pistol to his Ear." This might suggest that these Celebrations were no more than an expression of national vindictiveness engendered by the long war. But very different feelings were also aroused. "The speedy Return of our Townsmen imprisoned in France" was one of the Toasts. "It is difficult to describe the emotion with which this toast was drunk," says a contemporary account, "Many hundreds of the company had for years been mourning the captivity of husbands, fathers, sons, brothers and friends, whose return to their homes was, till this moment, more hoped for than expected: suffice it to say that many, very many, drank it with tears of joy." And when after the Celebration a balance of £49.14.2 remained, the Committee recommended that the money be applied to the Relief of Prisoners returning from France who belonged to Yarmouth.

The food and drink provided were much the same at Yarmouth, Beccles and other local Celebrations . . .

A Barrel for each Table was customary, and at Beccles the food provided was: 24 puddings, 6 Dishes to hold 84 lbs. Beef, with 1d loaf for each person, and 45 Pipes and 45 half-ounces of Tobacco per Table. Very detailed arrangements were made for the exact ingredients of the puddings and for the inspection of items, such as fruit, provided by local tradesmen.

To seat 2,000 people, in a reasonably compact group, in the middle of the town, was a task requiring some ingenuity. Then there was the delicate matter of which citizens should have the honour of presiding at the tables. This was arranged tactfully. The Rector presided at Table A, and Rev. Sloper at Table B. At Table C was the venerable Isaac Blowers, for 60 years a member of the Corporation; at Table D, the distinguished surgeon, W. Henchman Crowfoot — and so on to the 22nd Table.

All arrangements were now complete except for the distribution of tickets. These were available three days beforehand to be collected from any of the houses of 22 gentlemen in the town between 6 and 9 p.m. However, this plan appears to have been inadequate or misunderstood. It proved necessary to call upon the Town Crier to announce that tickets could be had at the Town Hall the following morning — for which service William Collins was paid 1/6. Still there were those without tickets. Again the Town Crier was needed: Tickets could be had at the Town hall at 9 a.m. on the 16th, the day before the Festival. Collins collected a second 1/6.

And so to the day, when Gowing recorded: "Pleasant day: little

rain at noon: the feast day for peace: 2,300 people dined in public: plum pudding and beef and plenty of ale."

Some rustic versifier, too, recorded his impressions on a broadsheet, sold no doubt for the customary 1d a sheet. He praises the feast and concludes thus his account of the toasts:

"The cannons roar'd, and each with loud applause,
To King and Allies burst with loud Huzzas.
The last was drunk by one and all,
With shouts of joy for the Tyrant's fall.
Quoth Tom to Sue this is a pretty sight
But shall we ever live to see
Or will good times ever be:
Why aye ye fool, don't make such humming,
For good old times are now a-coming,
When every week, as I am a sinner,
Plum pudding and beef will be for dinner."

Perhaps Tom, unusually replete with food and ale, did express such cheerful hopes, for how could he foresee the grim and troubled years that were so soon to follow? Meanwhile, after the Toasts, there was the Procession to admire, led by the loyal Yeomanry with a stirring band from Yarmouth; Britannia resplendent in a triumphal car drawn by "Tars that England's valour yield", Neptune with crown and trident; a symbolic wheatsheaf "born by rustics on the plough" —

"Last came the Tyrant, with disgrace all around,
It's no merit to beat him to the ground."

These crude and homely lines bring the scene to life and truly express the spirit of the occasion in their conclusion:

"Accept my thanks for this courteous fare,
May all unite in this my thanks and prayer,
First to God, that Peace He has restor'd,
Next to our King, by all to be ador'd;
Likewise to all our friends of Beccles town,
In Peace and Plenty may they long abound,
And to all our heroes that laurels bring,
Long may they live, and God save the King."

Nor was this the only effusion inspired by the day. Another account thus describes the burning of Napoleon's effigy —

"Men, women and their children all ate very hearty,
And after dinner made a fire for to burn Buonaparte.
When Buonaparte was in flames, oh how the fire blaz'd:
The gentlemen laughed heartily, they were so very *plased*:
The ladies at the windows stood and lifted up the sashes,
And waved their handkerchiefs and cried out:
'Burn the rogue to ashes!' "

It may well be that "the ladies" preferred to remain indoors when such boisterous activities were proceeding. The sports on the Common included "Two Pig Hunts". In his "Sports and Pastimes of the People of England" (1801) Joseph Strutt says: "Hunting the Pig is another favourite rustic pastime. The tail of the animal is previously cut short, and well soaped, and in this condition he is turned out for the populace

to run after him; and he who can catch him with one hand, and hold him by the stump of the tail without touching any other part, obtains him for his pains." Rough sport, indeed, and thirsty work — there was more beer provided on the Common — but surely not sport for ladies!

After all this jollification came the reckoning. Among all the miscellaneous items so carefully preserved by S. W. Rix are over sixty receipts for items supplied by local tradesmen, some of the receipts being for a dozen or more articles or services. Clay pipes were supplied at 3 a 1d; tobacco at 4½d an ounce. Some other items were:

Bonfire and Fireworks	£10 each
Carriage for Britannia	£6.10.0
do Buonaparte	£1. 5.0
Making Neptune: Jacket & Pantaloons	9.0
4 Mourning Suits for the Procession	16.0
Staff for Britannia	1.0
Beard for Neptune and Wig for Buonaparte	10.0

The aged and infirm were not forgotten and a special distribution was made to them of 18d each. When the accounts were drawn up a deficit of £20.1.4 was revealed. The outstanding bills were finally settled, by subscriptions from a few wealthier citizens, in 1818.

In the meantime, an event had taken place which threatened to make a mockery of all the Festivals. The celebrations had been premature. Napoleon escaped from his exile in Elba; once again Europe was in arms. But the alarm was short-lived. "Raised the bells for the victory gained at Waterloo," Gowing recorded on June 23rd 1815; and again, a month later, "Buonaparte taken by an English frigate: raised the bells; 'lowance at White Horse.' " So the bells rang out again, and Gowing and his fellows had their ale. But that, it seems, was all. Local purses were empty.

CHAPTER XXV

Conclusion: Continuity and Change

At Beccles Quarter Sessions in 1760, the Chief Constable of Wangford Hundred, Isaac Blowers, presented certain inhabitants of the town "for a nuisance in suffering swine to go about the streets of Beccles". They were duly fined. It is unlikely that Blowers would have taken this unusual step unless the nuisance had been considerable. The streets at this time were unpaved and unlighted. By the end of the century the Corporation had spent a large sum on paving and contributed to the provision of a hundred lamps. Those were notable improvements, and, with the building of the Assembly Room, the most obvious outward signs of increased wealth and gentility.

However, nuisances continued. At the Quarter Sessions in 1802, three citizens were fined five shillings each and one — a member of the Corporation — was fined one pound "for suffering hogs to go at large in the streets of Beccles".

The increase in the income and expenditure of the Corporation appears remarkable:

	Income	Expenditure		Income	Expenditure
	£	£		£	£
1763	164	151	1803	1739	1601
1764	157	146	1804	1964	1645
1765	207	189	1805	1749	1618

The enclosure of land and higher fees for pasturing were the principal reasons for the increase of income; and the extension of the Corporation's activities — such as help for the Church, payment for Militia substitutes, Inoculations, Lighting, interest on loans, labour on the enclosed land — increased its expenditure.

These changes were balanced by remarkable continuity in the Corporation itself. Once elected, a member held his position for life. Only a few retired when age or sickness incapacitated them. Most men served for over twenty years. There were numerous examples of much longer service —

Isaac Blowers	60 years	Owen Holmes	50 years
Robert Beane	36 years	William Elmy	41 years
William Crowfoot	37 years	Robert Davey	34 years

There was little change in the occupations of the Corporation members. Attorneys, doctors and merchants made up "The Twelve", from whose ranks the Portreeve was chosen, whilst "The Twenty-four" were shopkeepers, tradesmen and inn-keepers.

During the latter part of the century, the importance of fairs was diminishing as the number of shops increased. There was one great exception to this: the fairs for sheep, horses and cattle were larger than ever. In 1797, for the first time, Scotch drovers were invited to participate at Beccles Fair and "a large show of Cattle is consequently expected, so that in future these Fairs which have been of late increasing will probably in point of magnitude vie with any Fairs in this part of the County."

The precise increase in the number of shopkeepers is impossible to determine, but the increase was certainly large. By the turn of the century, when the population was about 2,500, the variety of occupations was considerable. Besides the clergy, the doctors and their apprentices, the attorneys and their clerks, the schoolmasters and mistresses, there were: an auctioneer, a land-surveyor, an excise officer, a corn-merchant, brewers, tanners (one of whom left £20,000), at least three grocers, three chemists or druggists (two of whom were also stationers and book-sellers), drapers, milliners, mercers, tailors, a hatter and hosier, a collar-maker, shoemakers, a soap-boiler, blacksmiths, a wheelwright, whitesmith, weavers, a cutter and hardwareman, watch-maker, a plumber and glazier, three or four butchers, half a dozen bakers, a saddler, an upholsterer, ironmonger, coopers, builders and bricklayers, a stone-mason, a pawnbroker, a pump-maker, a

carrier, yeomen, tenant farmers and agricultural labourers, a market-gardener, wherrymen, a basket-maker, a cabinet-maker, barbers, a wig-maker, a gunsmith and a silversmith, a wine merchant, a coach-builder — a longish list, certainly incomplete. There was a local bank whose partners were two attorneys and a brewer. There were at least four part-time agents of insurance companies.

Trade had its fluctuations. Peter Routh wrote to Martin in 1773 "Beccles news at present is made up of breakings among the inferior tradesmen. Ben Baker has managed to spend £300 a year and has little or nothing left to pay debts of near £2000. Jack Turvell hides; what were his debts, or what the composition likely, I have not heard. Woods is in treaty with creditors at London about a ten shilling Composition. Jack Smith the Whitesmith has also found means to be considerable enough to run away for debt."

Did these men sink down into the motley ranks of "the poor"? And how many of "the poor" were there in Beccles? Upon the second question, one piece of evidence has a bearing. In February 1784, "Several liberal subscriptions have been entered into by the inhabitants of Beccles, in order to render the situation of (that worthy part of the community) the industrious poor, comfortable in this inclement season. Three times a week a dinner has been provided at the White Lion, consisting of the best beef and bread, and served out to the relief of 750 persons at a time." We see from this how many people were glad of a free meal. The month is also significant. The latter part of the winter was the time of greatest need; extreme poverty approaching destitution was seasonal. January and February were the months in which, especially towards the end of the century, extensive charity was practised. Money and food were the things generally provided and coal was often distributed. An example commended in "The Norwich Mercury" was that of Robert Fellowes of Shottisham, who organised a subscription (heading the list with ten guineas) to provide blankets and coverlids for the poor, marked "Nelson and Victory", as a commemoration of the Battle of the Nile. Charity and pleasure were sometimes combined —

"For the Benefit of the Poor of Beccles.
A Ball at the Assembly Room, Friday 2nd Jan. 1801.
Rev. Bence Sparrow, Steward.
Tickets 5/-, Tea and Coffee included
Dancing to begin at 8 p.m."

And at Beccles, as elsewhere in East Anglia, it was the custom for the touring theatrical companies to give performances for charity when need was great during the winter. Fishers' Company performed "The West Indian" at Beccles in January 1814; the proceeds of £18.12.0 were distributed in 3d loaves by the churchwardens "which proved a great relief to upwards of 1,300 people during a very inclement season." Nearly half of the population, then, were glad to add these 3d loaves to their food supply. There was no lack of continuity in the needs of the poor.

When I consider the town of Beccles at the end of these fifty-five

years — its many spacious houses, comfortably furnished (in this great age of furniture-making) with their spacious grounds, stables, brewing-houses, gardens and orchards; the considerable and successful attempts to improve its amenities; the great variety of its occupations; the evidence of its contribution to the national war effort; its flourishing schools, its clubs, its theatre; and especially the kindly, tolerant, benevolent characters of those prominent citizens of whom some detailed records survive — such as Isaac Blowers, Dr. Crowfoot and Rev. Sloper — then I am drawn towards that natural aberration of the local historian: idealising his town and its inhabitants.

But darkening this rosy picture must be included other things — the incidence of petty crime; the absence of a medical dispensary; a good deal of social bickering; the inevitable strain of the long period of war; and, above all, the prevalence of poverty and its attendant evils. Edward Bartell in his "Hints on Picturesque Improvements, or Ornamental Cottages and their Scenery, including some observations on the Labourer and his cottage" (1804), admitted as a generally accepted fact "the natural tendency to filth and sloth among the lower classes", but added "How is it in the power of a family, consisting of perhaps eight or ten, or a dozen persons, crammed into a wretched hovel, seldom comprising more than two and sometimes only one apartment, to be otherwise than dirty?" Crabbe, the most truthful of poets, supplies a detailed picture of the lives of the poor (which I have been able to give only in the sketchiest manner for Beccles) in a sombre and affecting part of "The Borough" — "The Poor and their Dwellings".

He shows the poor — or at least the disreputable poor — as living apart from the other inhabitants of the town; and he mentions no charitable attempts to relieve them. But times were changing. The great extension in the education of girls had one especially important social consequence: the emergence of women as leaders in charitable endeavour. A subscription list for the Society for the Relief of the Sick Poor in Norwich (1815) has fifty female and less than ten male names. In November 1813 "The Norwich Mercury" stated: "The poor inhabitants of Beccles return thanks to the Ladies for instituting a Blanket Society and for distributing upwards of 300 amongst them, to their great relief at this inclement season." Women were also prominent in the rising missionary enthusiasm, as the final detail of this announcement of October 1815 shows —

"On Sunday 29th two sermons to be preached and collections made in Beccles Parish Church, for the British and Foreign Bible Society, by Rev. F. Cunningham, Rector of Pakefield. Morning: 10.45 a.m. Afternoon: 3 p.m.

On Monday 30th at 2 p.m. Public Meeting of the Beccles Branch of the Bible Society in the Assembly Room, Chas. Barclay M.P. in the Chair.

N.B. Seats will be provided for the Ladies".

Francis Cunningham, himself a man of active philanthropy, had an equally active wife, a sister of John Joseph Gurney. He had been presented to the living of Pakefield, in the previous year, by Robert Sparrow.

4.9.68

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